

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 5

INQUIRY INTO FERAL ANIMALS

¾¾¾

At Cooma on Thursday, 7 February 2002

¾¾¾

The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

¾¾¾

PRESENT

The Hon Richard Jones (Chair)

The Hon Jan Burnswoods
The Hon Richard Colless
The Hon Amanda Fazio
The Hon Duncan Gay
The Hon Malcolm Jones

This is a privileged document published by the Authority of the Committee under the provisions of Section 4 (2) of the Parliamentary Papers (Supplementary Provisions) Act 1975.

LINDA CAROLYN ERM SUTHERLAND, Director, South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board, 21 Ridge Street, Bega,

RAYMOND LENNON, Managing Ranger, South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board, 21 Ridge Street, Bega,

FERGUS DOUGLAS THOMSON, Director, South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board, 21 Ridge Street, Bega, and

LANCE ERNEST BEAMISH, General Manager, South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board, 21 Ridge Street, Bega, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Mrs Sutherland, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mrs SUTHERLAND: As a Director of the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board.

CHAIR: Are you familiar with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mrs SUTHERLAND: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you wish your submission to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Mrs SUTHERLAND: Yes.

CHAIR: Mr Lennon, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr LENNON: As an employee of the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr LENNON: I am.

CHAIR: Mr Thomson, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr THOMSON: As a Director of the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr THOMSON: I am.

CHAIR: Mr Beamish, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr BEAMISH: As the General Manager of the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr BEAMISH: I am.

CHAIR: Do you wish your submission to form part of this inquiry?

Mr BEAMISH: Yes.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that, in the public evidence, certain evidence or documents that you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request, but that decision may be overridden by a vote of the Parliament. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr THOMSON: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today to your Committee. I would like to introduce our team. Lance Beamish, who is seated on my left, will speak about the administration of our programs. Ray Lennon, who is seated on my right, will talk about the implementation of our programs and how they operate

from a staff point of view. I would like to give you a brief overview of the history of what we are doing and what our policy basically covers.

About nine years ago we were in the position where helicopter baiting was being phased out simply because, at that stage, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and us, through co-operation, decided that that was no longer the way we should be going. Since that time we have developed and expanded our knowledge on mound baiting—we believe to a satisfactory point. We have a large amount of rugged escarpment country in our board—from the escarpment through to the foothills and the coastal areas. For many years New South Wales farmers and Rural Land Protection Boards at their various conferences in Sydney passed motions and argued strongly that those two agencies should have a responsibility to contribute to the protection of private lands, as neighbours to private lands.

Many motions were passed to that effect. They believe that they should become responsible managers in the protection of private lands and in the eradication of predators. Under the arrangements that we have with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests and other agencies, they have accepted those responsibilities and have given protection as a neighbour. They also are not only responsible with us for the protection or the eradication of predators; they give protection to threatened and endangered species. Under the arrangements that we have, our board's policy basically is as follows. We try to maintain, as much as possible, minimal stock losses to our ratepayers. Landowners are able to utilise all their land across their properties and run stock in any area of their properties that they so desire.

Our policy also includes: to control wild dogs and foxes in an environmentally sensitive and responsible manner; and to continue our predator management program on an ongoing basis regardless of the fact that there may have been no stock losses. That key factor in our program took some years to arrive at. We believe that having no stock losses is the best incentive that we can use to continue the programs because that means that we are being effective. We also found that there was a lot of dummied figures to justify programs when it was felt that you had to have stock losses to justify a program. So we have taken out the misleading information and people are now totally satisfied that our programs will continue.

I suppose that we are different from other areas of the State in that we oppose the use of helicopter and ground baiting from vehicles. We oppose that as we believe that there is no ability to monitor dog takes from helicopter baiting. We are unable to determine the presence or otherwise of non-target species and live baits are only on the ground for a short period or a number of days as opposed to up to 150 days without mound baiting programs. We are all involved in the monitoring operation with National Parks using transects. We work with them in monitoring population numbers in the national parks and State forests. We do this before baitings and we do it after baitings. So we have a greater knowledge of what is out there in the country that we are operating in.

The South Coast board has been fortunate in that we have contract arrangements, as I said, with National Parks and State Forests. We also have arrangements with the Shoalhaven City Council, Eurobodalla Shire Council, Bega Valley Shire Council and the Department of Land and Water Conservation. The result of these unique arrangements is that we have developed extremely good working relationships with these bodies. We have a relationship which is easy and friendly. If, at any stage, we have a problem, either they can come to us or we can go to them at a higher level or at a lower level. So our staff and their staff communicate and we communicate at an administrative level.

Under these arrangements the burden of the costs of our predator management and our feral animal control—which was a cost which was borne totally by our ratepayers—is now one which is shared between our board and the other agencies. So we believe that is a win-win situation, not only for our ratepayers but also for the other agencies. Another benefit has been the acceptance by small land-holders that not only are we involved in wild dog management; we are also very involved in environmental management. We are involved in the protection of little terns. We are seen as being a plus in the eradication of foxes and cats. So, as a manager of a large land area—our board has normally been seen to be the body responsible for or representing large land owners—we now have an affinity with those who have smaller blocks.

We continue to update our mound baiting methods and our knowledge. We attend workshops. We have various other agencies and we work with people like Peter Catling in research on critical weight¹ range vertebrates. We are aware of the impact of our baiting methods and our operation and we will continue to do that to be a responsible environmental manager.

¹ Weight range means a vertebrate under 3kg, eg. quoll, bandicoot, potaroo ~ *Fergus Thomson, 1 Mar 02*

Mr BEAMISH: I will expand on how our contractors developed that with the agencies. As Fergus explained, usually we contract to Narooma and Eden national parks districts, which have been combined into the far south coast national park regions. That was to allow us to control the various species of feral animals within the board's districts, not only wild dogs and foxes. The contract called for eight major objectives; the reactive control of wild dogs, the strategic control of wild dogs and foxes adjoining private property, strategic control of wild dogs and foxes on threatened species, wild pigs on national parks land, goats on national parks land, rabbits on national parks land, deer on national parks land. We control goats by catching a female goat and fitting a radio-tracking collar and using that goat as a Judas goat. The contract also called for control of cats on national parks land.

We also have a contract with Bega Valley Shire Council to control vermin around their landfill sites, which has been extremely successful. With cats, we use a device called a felid attracting phonic [FAP], a Western Australian development. It is a small electronic chip placed in a one-inch pipe, probably 12 inches long. We place that near a cage and it gives off the sound of a cat meowing and that attracts cats to the cages. These programs, along with our memorandum of understanding with the Shoalhaven and Eurobodalla shire councils, have allowed us to be effective in the control of feral animals within our board's area. The policy that we have developed is good for not only the board and the ratepayers but also for the ongoing relationship between all government agencies in our area from the Victorian border to Sussex Inlet, a considerable distance.

CHAIR: You also mentioned that prior to 1993 wild dogs and foxes were responsible for untold damage to wildlife and domestic stock within the Bega RLPB. Do you have any figures on that? That comment contrasts with reports from other regions where it is said that the numbers have increased dramatically recently. Can you explain the difference in dog numbers in those regions?

Mr LENNON: I will answer that. I have figures from the board that were taken on reported and confirmed stock losses. I emphasise that they were confirmed stock losses, not anecdotal evidence of what happened six or 12 months ago. On the confirmed stock losses, in 1987 we had 552 sheep, 23 goats deaths and 95 maimings caused by dog and fox attacks. That number varied from 1987 until 1994. From then until the present we have had virtually nil reported and confirmed. I again emphasise nil confirmed stock losses in our board due to the programs undertaken in conjunction with other agencies.

CHAIR: That is amazing. Some people say that mound baiting is not cost effective. How do you reply to that?

Mr LENNON: People who make that statement do not look at the meaning of cost effectiveness. A lot of people look at the cost of that program against the cost of another program and totally disregard the effectiveness of that program. The cost of the programs that we conduct is not always the cheapest way to conduct a program, but we can demonstrate the cost effectiveness of it.

Mr THOMSON: Many years ago there was an organisation called the Southern Tablelands Dingo Destruction Board that operated in this area and covered the South Coast, Bombala, Cooma, Braidwood, Yass, Hume and Gundagai. That board employed trappers, about seven at one time. The area that the trappers could cover was obviously fairly limited. In those periods they operated from horseback. One of the main methods that they deployed was strychnine. I know that because I have the records that my father kept and he was the chairman of the board for 20-odd years. We have all the records of that period.

We know what was actually caught then. The ability for us to cover a wide range with mound baiting by vehicles and running programs in a number of places consecutively is enormous. We can cover the whole of the escarpment country in a week and that was not possible with trapping using horses.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is the comparison between the cost per dead dog of mound baiting prepared to aerial baiting? If you used multiple-drop aerial baiting would that be more effective than single-drop aerial baiting?

Mr THOMSON: I would hesitate to put a figure on that. I do not have the information. Bear in mind that we can monitor the dogs we take. If we have a program running using live baits for 150 days in our autumn baiting program, we know exactly what we are picking up. I am not sure how we can put a figure on a dog take by helicopter baiting.

Mr LENNON: It is the belief of all staff and directors of our board that it does not matter how much bait we put out by air, we can never demonstrate the numbers of dogs or foxes killed. It is supposition, it is conjecture.

We can demonstrate, using mound baiting techniques and trapping techniques, the number of baits that are taken by various species. That does not necessarily mean that we have killed X number of animals, it demonstrates only that X number of baits have been consumed by a particular species. I would have to concede that at least one bait was lethal, on at least one animal. We never overestimate the number of animals that have been eradicated, we always underestimate, from the number of baits that have been taken. In the aerial baiting situation, I would be grateful if anyone could demonstrate how they can calculate the number of baits taken by any species.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is the cost per bait taken in your area?

Mr LENNON: I cannot tell you of the top of my head. I can supply the figures to the Committee.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: I am intrigued by the statement that they are no stock losses in your regions. It is that a literal figure, do you have figures? Or is it that you do not want to tell us the figures?

Mr LENNON: We can tell you the figures, what we have are confirmed stock losses. We work on the basis that we will not take anecdotal evidence of animals attacked or killed by any other species, unless we can confirm it. It is important for us to know the exact figures of attacks or killings before we can put any submissions to government agencies or departments to ask for finance to continue programs. The only way that we can get reasonably accurate figures is to confirm the reports that come in. There is no point in any organisation saying that it has been reported that five months ago X sheep or calves have been attacked or killed.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: To you have current figures?

Mr LENNON: There are nil confirmed recordings.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: To whom does a farmer report when his livestock is attacked?

Mr LENNON: To the board.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Does the farmer need to complete a set form, or phone in?

Mr LENNON: Many years ago I tried to implement a formatted document for farmers to complete and return on a monthly basis. That practice was not continued because of lack of completion by individual farmers. We then reverted back to the farmer phoning the board or contacting the board by any method. We would then respond by going to the property and confirming what he had reported to the board.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: A phone call would be sufficient?

Mr LENNON: Yes.

Mr THOMSON: The complaints do not come only to the board. It may well be that they will be forward to the nearest office of National Parks. If someone goes to the National Parks office at Narooma or Merimbula we know that within hours that message will come to our office for us to look into. The message can be conveyed a number of ways.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: If a private vet looked at stock that were killed, without the farmer going through your procedure, would be authenticated as a kill? Or would the farmer have to go through your procedure and have your personnel identify the kill?

Mr THOMSON: Some years ago when someone reported something we tried to set up a procedure whereby that as soon as possible after it was reported we would send out a ranger or someone to verify that it was a kill. We tried to avoid a situation in which a landowner who may not have been into a paddock for some time found some dead sheep and perceived that they were killed by a dog. I am a landowner and I can understand that. We went down that path because we wanted to verify the kill and if it had been a dog attack, there was nothing we would not do. We would pull out all stops to help that person. We wanted to be able to say to National Parks that there was no doubt that it was a dog kill. Once you can verify that, then there are no excuses for holding back.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I am also a landowner and if I have stock that are in trouble, my first reaction is to go to my local vet. I may not think to immediately go through a process of reporting to the Rural Lands Protection Board [RLPB]. If a landowner comes to you sometime later and says, "I have had stock killed in this way

and I have had a vet out who has looked at it and verified it", would that go onto your list, or would that not be eligible for your list?

Mr THOMSON: Only if it was a recent kill that could certainly be verified. I think we are all familiar with what foxes, crows, eagles and other predators do to a carcass. We just like to verify it, and I think we have been pretty fair about it.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: The answer is yes, or no?

Mr THOMSON: We have not used vets. I think that is your question. But if someone wanted to use a vet to verify it, that would be fine.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: You mentioned dummyming of figures. Can you give us a little more information on that?

Mr THOMSON: We were at Kempsey where we were involved in a conference. Sitting around during the night before the conference in which we were involved, they were talking about that. They are still using helicopter baiting and distribution of baits from vehicles. They were saying to us that the number of dogs being reported on a yearly basis was remaining constant and the numbers of stock losses over the years was remaining constant. What we were saying was that either one of two things is not working here. Either the program is not working and you are not getting the dogs, or people feel the need to justify a baiting program by dummyming the figures. We see this as a real problem in that, as I said, there was always a need to justify a program by saying that we have dogs and we have stock losses.

When we were able to get to a situation and were able to say that our program is working, that we are not having stock losses and only want to maintain that position, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and State Forests were happy with that. They do not want the bad publicity of stock losses and they say, "Fine, what you are doing is working. Keep going." They accept the fact that we can submit a figure showing no stock losses, but the program continues. I think that gives a much truer position of what is going on rather than needing to justify a program by saying, "I lost a hundred", "I lost a hundred", so that you have multiple numbers being lost to justify it.

CHAIR: Your submission states that there are currently sufficient resources spent on feral animal control but these are squandered through lack of co-ordination. Can you give examples of how such waste occurs? Also you suggest that there should be a central regulating authority. What structures would you envisage for this authority?

Mr BEAMISH: The structure I envisaged was as I explained in my submission. As a rural lands protection board, we have the authority to use 1080 and we are also the authority for the control of pest animals. We should have overriding authority statewide, and the structure should be within the rural lands protection board. I am sorry, what was the first part of your question?

CHAIR: I asked about sufficient resources being spent that you say are being squandered through a lack of co-ordination.

Mr BEAMISH: The board feels that there are sufficient resources being spent but they need to be co-ordinated into one authority so that you have that authority working on all properties, agencies and land throughout the State. I do not feel that there is any need for additional funds but the funds need to be co-coordinated and used in a proper manner.

CHAIR: Given that there are severe problems locally, and that is quite evident, would your system work as well here? Would the same success be achieved here?

Mr LENNON: That is subjective. Without actually going into the area here and examining what is happening in conjunction with what we are doing in our area, it would be guessing at this point in time. I do not believe that we should guess, based on what we are doing in a particular area, about what can be achieved in another area until we actually go and examine that area and see what the problems are.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: I wish to return to the verification of the losses. We have established that a phone call is sufficient to notify you of a kill or of a maiming. You gave us figures for 1987 and then you mentioned a period through to 1994. You have got a situation where you state that there are no stock losses at the moment.

Mr LENNON: Would you like me to elaborate on those figures?

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: If there are programs which have resulted, as you say, in no stock losses, obviously they have been effective. I am interested in the history of that so that we can see where the improvements were achieved, as verified by those stock losses.

Mr LENNON: I can explain it this way by running briefly through from 1987 to 1994. The number of confirmed deaths with sheep are: 1987, 552; 1988, 322; 1989, 115; 1990, 23; 1991, 30; 1992, 67; 1993, 23; 1994, 47. From there through to the present day there have been no confirmed—I repeat "confirmed"—deaths in sheep that we have confirmed. Also at that point in time, 1987, we were not conducting any ground baiting programs in the form of mound baiting. We were conducting limited broadcast baiting programs on the ground where land-holders could come and get their 50 baits or whatever was necessary to do the job. The baits were broadcast around a particular area of the farm and in some instances in State forests and national parks. Those ground baiting programs gave us no indication of the results that could be achieved. We did not know whether they were picked up by birds and dropped elsewhere, or whether they were picked up by the target species itself. Also at that stage, the aerial baiting program was taking place.

We on the South Coast also looked at going outside the traditional aerial baiting that was conducted from the northern tablelands right through to Victoria and looked at going at a later date in the year. We achieved that by working in conjunction with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and using its helicopter to bait at a later date in the year. We found that that was more effective in the coastal area and I am not surmising that would be more effective anywhere else. In the coastal area it was more effective to go at a later time in the year because they found that there was less follow-up work to be done by baiting at a later time in the year. In saying that, we did not ever get on top of the dog problem by solely using aerial baiting. In the early nineties, we then decided to do ground baiting trials in the form of bait station work. This was carried out by ourselves, by National Parks and Wildlife Service officers and State Forests officers in a year-round rotation. That was done on a limited basis in areas called Yankees Flat and Yankees Gap. That then expanded over a number of years to a couple of other areas of the board.

We could not conclude that that system was working while at the same time we were conducting aerial baiting programs. The board made a conscious decision to cease aerial baiting programs for a period of two years to try to ascertain the effectiveness of the ground baiting programs. The effectiveness of the ground baiting program was demonstrated also in conjunction with the aerial baiting programs with those figures from about 1990 through to 1994. Those confirmed stock losses had been reduced. We continued with a ground baiting program and no aerial baiting programs but on a vastly increased area of ground baiting in the early 1990s up until today. What I have tabled before the Committee is a document which indicates part of a National Parks and Wildlife Service contract that we have. There are some 414-odd days when we are working on not only wild dogs and foxes but all species of feral animals.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Can you give us some information on feral pigs?

Mr LENNON: Yes.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Do you have any figures on kills of feral pigs?

Mr LENNON: We do have, but I do not have them with me. We can supply you with figures on kills of feral pigs, yes.

Mr THOMSON: I wish to add an explanation. Mound baiting for us has been a learning experience and one of the things which we have learned from it is that with the perimeter baiting for dogs, in the early years our takes on dogs on a yearly basis really did not decline that much in the first three or four years. Dogs replaced dogs in their territories. But it has been quite interesting that as the program has continued, the drawing-in effect of those dogs that were filling the territory of the dogs that had been taken has now drawn the dogs from further back into the parks and forests. Whereas we were running, say, 30 mound baiting sites in the early days, we have been able to reduce that to a much smaller number because the dogs are not coming to all of those stations and they are not drawing out of the areas where they traditionally were when we started. It has taken some years to reach the point that we now are at, where we have drawn the dogs in from a wide area and they are not being replaced.

CHAIR: The dogs have not learned to identify the mounds as being dangerous places?

Mr THOMSON: We do not believe so, although obviously it will be dogs who will be shy and that is something that we are very careful about. It is also something which, at a workshop at Batemans Bay with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests and other agencies, we looked at very closely and we looked at a range of things which may create shyness.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Lennon, I wish to query some of the figures you gave us about the sheep losses since 1994. Over that period, can you tell us what has happened to the total sheep numbers for your area? Has it declined, is it the same, or are there more people involved?

Mr LENNON: In some areas, that certainly has declined and in other areas it has increased with varying changes in the enterprises that have been conducted.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: And the mound baiting, is that done on private land as well as on public land?

Mr LENNON: Under our contract works, it is only done on a very limited basis on private land. Under our obligations regarding the Rural Lands Protection Act, yes we certainly can carry out, and do carry out, mound baiting on private land and encourage land-holders to carry out mound baiting on their own private land, in comparison to what they were doing in the past which was the broadcasting of baits.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What sort of adoption rate of mound baiting have the private land-holders taken up?

Mr LENNON: I would have to say that of those people who traditionally baited dogs, in excess of 90 per cent would be adopting the mound baiting method.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Can you give the Committee some figures on what sort of costs per hectare private land-holders would be experiencing in terms of feral dog control, particularly on private land? I want to use that as a bit of a comparison later on when looking at the costs per hectare that are being paid for feral animal control on public land.

Mr LENNON: No, I cannot give you that cost per hectare.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Either for private or public land?

Mr LENNON: For public land, yes. It is only an estimate per hectare. It is certainly not concrete, confirmed areas. We can show you, as demonstrated in the table that you have there, the areas in which we are conducting these programs. That is only part of one of our contracts.

CHAIR: It would appear that the mound baiting has been extraordinarily successful. Clearly, you have been refining that. Do you anticipate any more refinements, or is it actually at its optimum now?

Mr BEAMISH: Fergus and Ray attended a meeting in Batemans Bay with National Parks, State Forests and other agencies. It is proposed this year that we are going to undertake trials on different ways of doing mound baiting—with the bait being buried below the ground, with no mound at all and bringing in foreign soil from outside. We will record what we find from those stations. One of the problems with our program in the past is that we have had the practical experience and we have the practical figures, but we have not done the research work that we should have done so that we could give you the figures that you have been asking about. In future we intend to do the research work as well as the practical work.

Mr LENNON: My understanding of the terms of reference is that we are talking about feral animals as a whole. We also have had a significant impact on other feral animals due to other contracts with local governments, for example, cats that are affecting the environment. We are also looking at the control of pigs, goats, rabbits, deer, et cetera, in Crown land areas and, if necessary, on privately owned land. One of my concerns and one of the concerns that I believe the Committee should consider is that our board is very much concerned about the threat of exotic diseases in this country. We look holistically at controlling all those feral animals that will have and can have an impact not only on our native species but also on domestic livestock. I would like to make it clear that, in my opinion, the terms of reference go much further than dog and fox and attacks on sheep.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: You mentioned cats in particular. Do you have any figures on cat kills?

Mr LENNON: We should have. I have not been involved with that. I supervise five rangers on our board and one of those rangers has been working primarily on cat control, with waste depots, et cetera, throughout the district. So he certainly could supply that.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Could you furnish the Committee with those results? Could you supply the Committee with the cat kill figures?

Mr LENNON: Over what period?

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: We would like as much as you can give us. The further you can go back historically the easier it will be for us to see the effectiveness of the programs that you have applied.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Could you also furnish the Committee with a diagram of your cat killer?

Mr THOMSON: Yes.

(The witnesses withdrew)

MICHAEL JAMES GREEN, Grazier, Doolondondale, Nimmitabel, and

GRAHAM JOHN HILLYER, Ranger, Bombala Rural Lands Protection Board, 5 Bright Street, Bombala, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Mr Green, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr GREEN: I am appearing as a grazier and a Director of the Cooma Rural Lands Board.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr GREEN: I am.

CHAIR: Mr Hillyer, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr HILLYER: As a Ranger for the Bombala Rural Lands Protection Board.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the term of reference of this inquiry?

Mr HILLYER: I am.

CHAIR: Do you wish your submission to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Mr HILLYER: I do.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that, in the public interest, certain evidence or documents that you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request, but that decision may be overridden by a vote of the Parliament. Do you wish to elaborate upon your submission or make a short statement?

Mr HILLYER: I will make a short statement. Within the Bombala Rural Lands Protection Board area our main feral animal problems, except for rabbits and foxes, are adjacent to or on Crown land areas. We also border Victoria, and most of the country that we adjoin is mainly bushland or semi-bushland. There is not much open grazing. They share common problems. One of our main approaches to animal control in the Bombala area has been an integrated approach. We do not just try to rely on one method of control. That applies to all methods of feral animal control. We are concerned about the build-up in particular of wild dogs in the area. This has been a most contentious issue with most land-holders, as you would probably be aware, from the reaction of New South Wales farmers and the meetings of National Parks.

We try to help and we co-operate with any park or forestry programs, but we understand that they are restricted because of funding issues. In our area funding to National Parks has improved. However, a big problem is emerging with forestry not having enough funding to be able to properly implement feral animal programs. As you would have seen in our submission, we always support new methods and control devices that are looked into. One issue that has been raised of late—an issue about which we are very concerned—is that we now have to stipulate that rubber-jaw traps have to be serviced once per day. There is much feeling about that and a lot of hesitation to bait stations and we are having problems baiting the dogs. They are becoming accustomed to human activity and it is causing more problems for control.

We believe that that is why a lot more dogs are now being seen out in the open in the daytime. They have become used to human activity. Over most of our area we believe that the dogs have not hybridised a great deal. I have been with the board for 27 years and I believe that a lot of the dogs that we are catching are the same type of dogs that we were catching when I first joined the board. That has been verified by a couple of our trappers. Another problem that I think is emerging in a number of other areas—it is an issue of concern—is the deer problem. We feel that there should be tighter restrictions on deer farmers in respect of fencing. Perhaps there should be more legislation to ensure that they are held liable when deer escape or are let go. This is an emerging problem. I am sure you appreciate that that is happening quite a bit in the eastern areas of New South Wales.

Mr GREEN: I am a grazier on the eastern side. My family has been out there since the 1830s. During that period we have had the same boundary with the eastern escarpment. So we have had a lot of experience over the

years in dealing with feral animals. Although those who are here today have mentioned a number of other species, I guess that the dog and the fox are the animals that brought us here today. I am also a director of the Cooma Rural Lands Protection Board. To emphasise that there is a problem, we recently started a management plan in the Snowy Plains area. The chap who went up there and who has been trying to mound bait has been unable to take dogs because the pigs are eating the baits out of these mounds straightaway. So there are problems in the area.

The Cooma board requires broad-scale integrated management plans that are adequately funded. You might have visited Wee Jasper yesterday and observed that Wee Jasper has a management plan that is working along those lines. We are starting along those lines and we are looking at integrated management plans that use all the methods that are available. We believe that that is the most important thing. It gives the best and most cost-effective result. When we are talking about feral animals, how do we define feral animals? Basically we say that feral animals are probably equal to what we see in suburbia in Sydney. Another example is when someone's plum tree grows over a neighbour's fence. We see that as an invasion of other peoples' land by another species.

All neighbours acknowledge that a species that they might like to run on their land or on the land that they are looking after could invade another person's land and that is when the problems occur. We heard a lot about aerial baiting this morning. Aerial baiting is a very emotional issue. Aerial baiting was a broad-scale control program. It commenced in the early 1960s or 1970s and it coincided with the period in which a lot of the country in this area was resumed back into parkland. Consequently, a lot of stockmen and a lot of families vacated land that they had held for a long time. In the course of their management of that land they controlled dogs, foxes, goats or pigs. Aerial baiting took over from that broad-scale method of controlling feral species.

Looking back, the biggest mistake that was ever made was when aerial baiting was ceased. It was a very emotional period. That resulted in the cessation of broad-scale control. Since then the fox and the dog, as it now is, have enjoyed the freedom to breed, to play and to live. Ever since the fox was introduced in Australia it has always been persecuted and controlled because of its impact on lambs. With the cessation of aerial baiting, foxes have been allowed to breed.

CHAIR: You have heard the evidence of the representatives from the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board and their method of mound baiting, which was very specific and quite effective. Have you tried the same method?

Mr GREEN: Yes, mound baiting is very successful. If we do the same amount of trapping we would probably take out the same number of dogs. If we get more people sitting on rocky hills with rifles, they will take out a lot of dogs as well. It has been proven that the more men used, the more effective.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Page 4 of your submission at paragraph (e) you mentioned mound baiting shyness. Could you elaborate on that?

Mr HILLYER: Yes, we can substantiate that. In the Kosciusko Park area we have been doing some transect sections with sand pads across the roads. Our trapper has found that a lot of dogs go along the tracks and bypass the mounds. That is why we have to have an integrated approach and quite often that is where you have to use traps. In the Kosciusko area there is a lot of rugged country, and a lot we cannot get into. There are too many loopholes where we cannot mound or trap properly and that is why we advocate aerial baiting. We are not saying broad scale baiting all over the park, but in areas where the river corridors make it inaccessible.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: The South Coast RLPB representatives were happy to report that they had had no stock losses. Do you have records of stock losses reported in your region?

Mr GREEN: The rural lands board has a very detailed report on sheet your figures. I have figures from 1974, and we can go back further than that. I dare say that if the parks had enough Rangers in and they counted their red wallabies they could say that six were missing, just as we could say that there are six sheep missing. For sheep kill figures to be effective we convert them to percentage terms. In 1970 about 12,000 sheep went to Snowy Plain of which about 200 were killed. That gave a 1 per cent kill, and that is when aerial baiting was used. Last year 1,200 sheep were taken to Snowy Plain and 200 were killed, which was 12 per cent. Grazing enterprises change for various reasons, including the fact that dogs have eaten out their sheep. We have worked from our figures and hope that in a year or two we will be able to say that in 2001 we had 20,000 sheep exposed to dogs of which 1 per cent or 10 per cent were killed.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Working from percentages, are you able to give historical figures?

Mr GREEN: This morning we heard people talking about figures and cooking the books. Last year we made an effort with Snowy Plain to get the old figures into percentage terms. We have put an enormous amount of work into that and we have come up with figures that we consider to be reasonably accurate. From now on we will be looking at a percentage kill. At a meeting in Queanbeyan last year I was asked what I was worried about, because the Monaro has a million sheep and only 3,000 were killed last year. In percentage terms that is very small. We know that the sheep around Cooma are not exposed to dogs. But I know that my sheep on my farm are exposed to dogs.

CHAIR: Would you make those figures available to the Committee?

Mr GREEN: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Did you say that in 1970 20,000 sheep went up to the Snowy Plain and last year it was 1,200?

Mr GREEN: No, in 1970 12,000 sheep went to the Snowy Plain and last year it was 1,200.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: That is an enormous reduction. Surely that has to be considered in relation to this inquiry.

Mr GREEN: A lot of factors figure in this. In 1970 we had a long history of broad scale control and people felt safe taking their sheep to Snowy Plain. That may have coincided with a tough year in the Monaro, and the mountains tended to be better in the summer. People felt it was safe to take their sheep there. Last year people took their sheep there only as a last resort, and paid a terrible price.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: What happened in the intervening 28 years?

Mr GREEN: Unfortunately we do not have figures available on how many sheep have been going to Snowy Plain every year. We have to do that through old stock books. As the broad scale control programs were reduced the dog kills increased, less stock have been taken to Snowy Plain. All around the Monaro and on the eastern side, the traditional sheep country no longer run sheep.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: There are other reasons for that.

Mr GREEN: Yes, bearing in mind that there have been surges in the wool and sheep market, and surges with cattle. I will put my hand on the *Bible* and say that largely the reason that sheep are not going to Snowy Plain, not being exposed to the park country to the eastern side is because of the amount of killing that is going on and it is increasing.

CHAIR: Of the 1,200 sheep that were killed how many dogs would have been involved?

Mr GREEN: Yes, and probably the worst example I know of on the eastern side involved one gang leader dog, and he was even named. Over a two-year period more than 35 dogs were caught or shot around him, but the main offender was never caught. In excess of 1,000 sheep were killed.

CHAIR: By one dog?

Mr GREEN: One dog, as the leader of the pack.

CHAIR: If the leader is caught would that have an impact on the pack?

Mr GREEN: If we could have caught him early in the peace, it would have been good because he kept returning to the eastern side. In the words of the trapper, he brought mum, he brought dad, he brought the kids, he brought the wives. We never caught that dog, he disappeared.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Mr Green, you referred to any method of feral animal control being effective but did not differentiate between various methods. Mr Hillyer, what is your opinion on hunting out dogs as opposed to baiting?

Mr HILLYER: The only way to hunt dogs is to wait for them to come out. That is what sometimes happens with difficult dogs. They wait for the dogs to come to the sheep. As far as hunting dogs out of forest areas, the chances are very low. The main way to get problem dogs that will not trap or bait is to wait for them to come out. Some trappers howl them up and wait for an opportunity to shoot.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: What about feral pigs? Are feral pigs an identifiable problem in this area? Are they manageable? What is the best way to eradicate them?

Mr HILLYER: I complement the Parks and Forests people on the work that they have been doing. However, they have been hindered by pig hunters. The numbers were escalating and a few years ago they had the foresight to see the numbers emerging especially in the forest areas. The Forests personnel took it upon themselves to do something about it. In our area the pig problem has dispersed further, and the numbers are lower.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: What happened?

Mr HILLYER: When the doggers came in, they dispersed them further.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: What did National Parks and State Forests do to stop the escalation of pig numbers?

Mr HILLYER: Mainly they relied on trapping and shooting. Trapping was the number one method that they used.

CHAIR: How much co-operation do you have with State Forests and National Parks?

Mr HILLYER: We have a good relationship with them, and we understand that they have their problems with funding and restrictions. We have to try to work together. In my submission I noted that we have a working relationship with most people over the board as well.

CHAIR: It is a satisfactory relationship?

Mr HILLYER: We feel that it is, and we are building on it. However they are also restricted in what they can do, as we are. A lot of the field people would like to try other things, but they are restricted.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Are they frustrated because of the lack of funds?

Mr HILLYER: In some cases, yes. Earlier I mentioned Forests, because their funding has been cut down and they cannot perform their job properly.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Have they expressed that frustration to you?

Mr HILLYER: Yes, all the time.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: You mentioned funding and restrictions. What restrictions did you mean?

Mr HILLYER: Restrictions in methods of servicing traps. Also the cost factors and the amount of country to try to get over with the number of staff. There has been a bit of an increase in staff lately, and that has to be kept up. With pigs, or any other animal, once you get the numbers down it costs a lot more to catch that animal. Some people want to knock off then, but that is the most important time; you have to keep the numbers down to try to eradicate them.

Mr GREEN: I backup what Graham said. Our relationship with government agencies is certainly on the increase. When we worked with the Cooma board, the Jindabyne office, on the management plans for the western side we had a lot more co-operation. We all understood the restrictions. It is just like neighbours talking over the back fence about their problems.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: What resources would you like provided to you which would assist you in tackling feral animals? I am not talking only about money.

Mr GREEN: I do not know how to put a figure on that. I could simply say, quite bluntly: Get the hell out of our lives, give us aerial baiting, we do not want to talk to you, we can handle it. However, we know that that is not feasible. The management plans, such as the one for Brindabella and the Snowy Plain, probably need about six full-time employees working on the wild dog problem. So if you put \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year down, that is just for the man in the field. It is money, but it is not huge money.

CHAIR: The National Registration Authority for Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals [NRAAVC] is considering deregistering 1080. It has been banned in America, as you know, and Proposition 4 reconfirmed that ban in California. What would happen if the use of 1080 was withdrawn?

Mr GREEN: Two things would happen. The first point is that I think that everybody these days is aware of the impact of foxes on our native fauna. The second point is that 1080 has been such a wonderful chemical to use. We heard the word "strychnine" used earlier on. There is any amount of substances that are not illegal. There is any amount of substances on the shelves in Woolworths or at the local garden supplier. There is any amount of substance out there that is cheap. It is not selective, but it will kill dogs and it will kill foxes. The most brutal way for me to do that is for me to crush up a glass and put it into some mincemeat and I could kill every dog and fox that there is in the district. That is what would happen.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Green, I am glad you answered that question because I was certainly going to ask you to express your concerns about the possible banning of 1080. Mr Hillyer, you might be able to give us your thoughts on the effect of aerial baiting on the native wildlife, in particular quolls. You might address whether you have any information on the daily range of quolls or the foraging range of quolls compared with the foraging range of dogs and foxes.

Mr HILLYER: Just on the quolls issue, there is an area they are looking at now in the project conducted by the New South Wales Farmers Association in the park area, which is in our area. I can go back to the turn of the century for that area. There were quolls. Every time you go into that area, there is evidence of quolls.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you regularly see them when you are in those areas?

Mr HILLYER: No, you do not see them a real lot, but you see the evidence of them—their tracks and scats and that sort of thing. That area was continuously baited with other material such as phosphorus and strychnine before 1080 came about. Then in every program, we have aerial baited through that area and there is still a good quoll population there. I really feel that there are areas within the dryland areas of the park where they do not prey on the red meat. They are living on white meat and you only have to study their habitat where they are to know that they are living more on lizards and birds and that type of thing. That is where you find the high populations. I hope that this will be proved right with these surveys.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What about their foraging range? How far will they travel to get a feed at night?

Mr HILLYER: I am not really conversant with that but I do not believe that they cover great big areas. They stick to the dry ridges in some of those areas. On the eastern side, I realise that they do go a little bit further and it might be a little bit different there, but there are still quolls there. There are still the same number of quolls now as what there were back 30 years ago, in my opinion.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What about dogs? How far will a dog travel at night to feed?

Mr HILLYER: Dogs can travel up to 30 kilometres or more to feed. Quite often they will come out and then they go straight back in. Then they might not come in for another four or five nights. Trappers get to know their patterns when they come in and go out.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: If aerial baiting was resumed on a perimeter basis, is it possible, do you think, that baiting on a perimeter basis like that would intercept dogs coming out of the park to feed at night but would not impact on the quolls population?

Mr HILLYER: I feel we have to compromise if they do prove that quolls do take the baits but I think there are a lot of areas in a lot of parks that do not have quolls. The critical thing that has got to happen is that there has to be more work done on quolls. I do not think that there is really a real lot known on their proper distribution. It amazes me that people just think that all parks have quolls and that is just not correct. I have been over the whole

park areas and I feel that there are plenty of areas that could be baited and not have problems with other native fauna with aerial baiting. Regarding perimeter baiting, we were more or less perimeter baiting with mounding and in some areas, especially in later years, with the aerial baiting. I think the big dog population at the moment is that there are so many back further that they are just going to keep on coming. I think that has got to be a fairly big perimeter area to make any real big impact. The four kilometres that they were working on a few years ago with even mound baitings showed just that the dogs travel out all the time. As I say, they can go up to 30 kilometres or 40 kilometres if they want to in a night.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You have made comments on dogs hybridising with dingoes. There is a bit of conflict between your statements and what is in Mr Green's submission where he suggests that there is considerable hybridisation occurring with escaped pig dogs and dingoes. When you say that in your opinion there has been no evident change in the type of dogs over the past 25-odd years, would you call the dogs that are in the park basically pure-bred dingoes, or are they wild or feral dogs?

Mr HILLYER: There is a feeling that some of them are getting up fairly well to being pure bred but, as I say, different areas have different types of dogs. Over in the Kosciusko area we get the yellow dog. We get some yellow dogs on the eastern side and then you get the black and tan. I have spoken to all of our national parks people and when they do trapping, they never ever pick up really hybridised-type dogs. They are the same type of dogs, and I see quite a few of these, they been catching over the past few years. Another thing is that they very rarely ever trap pig dogs. A lot of them are picked up by baiting. What happens with the true dogs is they hunt a lot of those mongrel-type dogs out. I cannot account for, say, the more northern part of the Cooma board but I think that there are a lot of dogs that come in there and there have been a lot of releases of dogs whereas down in our area there has not been the release of dogs coming out of the high population areas. There is an odd dog that will cause problems but with the more domesticated type, normally you would pick that up very quick.

Mr GREEN: Just to reiterate about the northern part of the Cooma board—I am sure you have all gone through Kiandra. From Adaminaby through Kiandra up to Tumut—all that country through there—there is anecdotal evidence, any amount of it, that for probably 100 years while that was always stocked with sheep, there really was not a dog in there. It is only since really the 1960s when it was taken over as park that a huge population of dogs have bred up in there. There has been a lot of DNA testing done on them but certainly there is hybridisation there. In fact, the population of dogs out there can be gauged by a trapper who has been out there for the last two years and who has trapped something like 100 dogs. Certainly on the eastern side where I live, yes, I would say that the dogs coming through there are probably the same dogs that my father has described were around when he was a kid and I am sure it goes way back. But certainly on the other side there is a lot of hybridisation.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: The evidence you have given to us illustrates very graphically the problems which you have in your areas. By contrast, the evidence which we heard earlier would suggest that on the line of the escarpment on one side there is a dog population problem and that on the other side the dog population is almost thoroughly under control. Would you like to comment on the contrast in the evidence which we have received this morning?

Mr GREEN: You are all different—from different parties—are you not? Occasionally you do not agree with each other.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Yes, but evidence surely is evidence.

Mr GREEN: Speaking about our eastern-side figures, we have a big problem in the east. We have a common boundary with the South Coast board for 40 kilometres or 50 kilometres. There is a dog problem there.

Mr HILLYER: My feeling on that is that probably we have a much higher sheep population. In most of our area, there are no cattle or principal cattle operations. They are all sheep operations. There are high numbers of sheep and that is where the dogs are getting into—where the higher sheep populations are. I do not like to dispute figures and I do not know whether they have had the report but I know that there have been dogs that have been killed in the Bega board only just recently on a property at Burragate. The trapper or the feral control officer from the parks in Bombala has been down there. He is a fellow we have had working for us under contract. We have got him in the field down there and he caught a dog down there.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: A sheep kill or a dog kill?

Mr HILLYER: It was a dog kill and there was also a sheep kill, but they may not have been told about that anyway.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Hillyer, I might just go back quickly to the quoll issue again, if I might. Are you aware of any experimental work which has been done on the type of baits that quolls do not take?

Mr HILLYER: No, this is something that we are trying to promote. I put in my submission that I think they should be looking at different bait material and different bait sizes. Hopefully this is something that will come out of this pilot program in the Kosciuszko National Park between the New South Wales Farmers Association and the park.

CHAIR: In your submission you say that the present methods of mound baiting are not working successfully in some areas. Why is that, do you think?

Mr HILLYER: That is, as I said earlier, because of bait shyness. I will also confirm that with our local dog controller in Bombala who is working through the park. He has had dogs that have been going past bait stations and the only way to pick them up is through trapping.

CHAIR: Is this the same type of mound baiting that is done by the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board?

Mr HILLYER: Yes.

CHAIR: It is exactly the same type?

Mr HILLYER: Yes. Years ago we could never have controlled dogs with just aerial baiting. You have to have an integrated approach. Back when we used strychnine, you had to have an integrated approach. You have to run both together and that has gone on ever since there have been dogs. They have always poisoned and trapped as well because you will get dogs who will be poisoned and also you get dogs that will not be poisoned but you can trap them.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Mr Green, I think initially you mentioned the release of dogs. I just wonder whether you can give us some indication of where the dog population is coming from. Obviously they are breeding, but when you mentioned the release of dogs, who released them and to what degree is that a problem?

Mr GREEN: I will need parliamentary privilege to answer that. If you asked my father, he would say that certainly on the Kiandra side and certainly on the eastern side when various dogs have been caught, they are obviously dogs that have been released. Under parliamentary privilege I would name people.

CHAIR: You can. You have parliamentary privilege.

Mr GREEN: I am just trying to say this in a certain way because there are a few people I do not want to offend. Basically it would seem to be radical elements of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Traditionally we have learned to blame the park for everything. Whether they were actually park rangers or whether they were people who put themselves up as associates of the park, the dogs have definitely been released. There are no two ways about it.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Are you saying that they are western dingoes that have been released in there, or wild dogs?

Mr GREEN: North, east, south or west—who knows? In the Kiandra area, there is an enormous number of white dogs that have been caught up there. We never see a white dog in the east and there is an enormous number of white dogs in the Kiandra area. We know that the white dogs were used in Kiandra on the goldfields. We know that that type of dog was there then. It is something that I know but I could not stand up in a court of law and accuse anybody by saying, "I know that you have released dogs". But, anecdotally, everyone just blames the parks.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: We have received submissions which reveal that pig hunters leave and leave their dogs behind. Is that a problem in this area?

Mr GREEN: It is a problem. I look at it in two ways. Pig hunting is a great release for young blokes in town. First, it gets them out of town and they do not seem to get into trouble when they are chasing a few pigs. Second, a certain cult of people chases pigs. The worst example of pig hunting is when the fellows who do not use dogs cut off the ears of the pigs so that the dogs cannot get them. In that way they have more fun tracking and shooting pigs because the dogs cannot get them. The pig hunting cult is pretty ordinary. Some pretty ordinary people are involved. A lot of the dogs that turn up are dogs out of the pounds in Canberra, Sydney or Cooma. Some people who release their dogs when they are chasing pigs never see those dogs again. Some professional shooters who turn up have dogs with radio collars on them. Those dogs are pets or companion animals. They value those dogs and they ensure that they never leave their dogs behind. But there is a group of people who, unfortunately, leave their dogs behind.

(The witnesses withdrew)

JOHN BRADFORD BAUER, Grazier, Burra, Tumbarumba,

ROGER DONALD ANDERSON, Chairman, Tumbarumba Shire Feral Animal Working Group, Burra, RMB 152, Tumbarumba,

BRENT STEPHEN LIVERMORE, Manager, Environmental Services, Tumbarumba Shire Council, 559 Batlow Road, Tumbarumba, and

JANICE MARY WALKER, Grazier, Strathdoon, Glenroy Road, Tumbarumba, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Mr Bauer, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr BAUER: I am a member of the Tumbarumba Shire Feral Animal Working Group.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr BAUER: I think so, yes.

CHAIR: Mr Anderson, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr ANDERSON: As Chairman of the Tumbarumba Shire Feral Animal Working Group.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr ANDERSON: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Mr Livermore, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr LIVERMORE: I am appearing as a representative of the Tumbarumba Shire Council. I have also been involved in that capacity on the Tumbarumba Shire Feral Animal Working Group.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr LIVERMORE: Yes.

CHAIR: Ms Walker, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Ms WALKER: I am a councillor on Tumbarumba Shire Council. I am also a beef, wool and fat lamb producer and I am a member of the Tumbarumba Shire Feral Animal Working Group.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms WALKER: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you wish your submission to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Ms WALKER: Yes.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that, in the public interest, certain evidence or documents that you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request, but that decision may be overridden by a vote of the Parliament. Do you wish to elaborate on your submission?

Mr LIVERMORE: I will touch on a few brief points from council's perspective. Council has certainly been very supportive of the activities of the Tumbarumba Shire Feral Animal Working Group which was set up as a co-operative and integrated approach to control feral animals. The priority issue at the moment is wild dogs, as has been apparent in some other areas. However, we also recognise the impact of feral animals on native flora and fauna. Council has an obligation to take part in activities that look after economic, social, environmental and health

aspects and the wellbeing of the broader community. In that regard council is looking at providing advocacy support to the Tumbarumba Shire Feral Animal Working Group.

One of the issues obviously is to lobby for financial resources to ensure that this control program is implemented. We support the work that is being done by government agencies, in particular State Forests. In the Tumbarumba area State Forests has been largely involved with dog researchers who have been doing radio tracking of dogs in the Bago forest, DNA sampling of dogs that have been trapped or shot there and carrying out scat analysis in an endeavour to get some scientific basis to some of these problems. Traditionally, there has not been a lot of accurate data. That has been one of the problems in implementing some of the control programs. So we feel that that is an important aspect. The resources must be made available to continue that work.

Again, from a council perspective—I do not want to get too bogged down, given that this inquiry is about feral animals—we are very much involved, to a certain extent, with the feral animal problems. They have an interrelationship between one another. Today we have heard about pigs and dogs. I feel that there is a definite interrelationship between those problems. The dog problems emanate from the pig problems. The pig problems, if you like, then keep the cycle of dog problems going. They interrelate with other problems to do with noxious weeds. We have vast problems there because of the amount of State forest and national parkland that is covering our shire area. Again there are interrelationships in that area.

Feral animals spread noxious weeds and noxious weeds provide a harbour for feral animals. The control measures, historically, have been reactive. Again, this is why we support the work of the local feral animal working group to get a co-ordinated approach to control. Basically, we support the work that is being done. One of the main issues we would like to get across from a council perspective is that resources certainly must be made available at a government level. We are finding in our area that we have good co-ordination between the different bodies. Everybody is willing to get in there and work together to overcome the problem. However, we need to try to make sure that that does keep happening.

Mr ANDERSON: The Tumbarumba Shire Feral Animal Working Group has established a co-operative wild dog-fox management program consisting of State Forests, Tumbarumba, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Khancoban, Hume Rural Lands Protection Board, Tumbarumba Shire Council and local community members who are primary producers of sheep and cattle. The aim of the group is to provide a co-ordinated and effective wild dog and fox control program to minimise the impacts of wild dogs and foxes on native animals and agricultural production.

The six objectives of the plan are: to reduce stock losses within 12 months by 80 per cent; to increase wild dog and fox observations reported to the Hume Rural Lands Protection Board; to obtain sufficient monitoring data by March 2003 to inform on the numbers and movements of wild dogs and foxes in the area; to educate the community about the extent and nature of the wild dog and fox problem; the agricultural community must be informed of the plan and methods of minimising stock losses; and, finally, we aim to conserve a viable population of the dingo in the Kosciusko National Park.

Our strategies to achieve these objectives include 1080 bait stations, trapping, monitoring and community education and promoting management techniques that will minimise dog attacks on livestock. We envisage this program to involve, first, setting up permanent bait stations. Second, there will be a system of monitoring sites from which data will be collected and analysed. Third, we will obtain the formal support of private land managers by assistance with bait stations and trapping management. Fourth, we will ensure the distribution of educational material to land-holders. Fifth, there will be an accurate costing of the program and an apportioning of costs on the basis of wild dog habitat area.

We strongly believe in the benefits of this co-operative wild dog and fox control program. There must be a more efficient and effective utilisation of resources through a co-ordinated control program. There must also be a sharing of skills and knowledge. There must be an expected reduction in stock losses and economic impacts on the rural community. There must be an increased and more balanced awareness of the issues of wild dogs and foxes throughout the community. Increased information resulting from monitoring and reporting of observations will provide a clearer picture of the actual abundance and movements of wild dogs and foxes.

The last benefit is the potential to attract funding through co-operative grant applications. The limitation to our program is money. We estimate the costs for implementing the program in our area for 12 months to be \$300,000. Can National Parks and State Forests sustain a large proportion of those costs? They need extra funding from the State Government and recognition by the Government that government bodies need funds. We have co-

operation between the National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests, Cooma Rural Lands Protection Board, Tumbarumba Shire Council and land-holders. We have a plan and it will be implemented by the end of this month. We need the Committee's support for its sustained implementation.

CHAIR: Is that plan available?

Mr ANDERSON: It is not available yet, because it is in draft form. It should be finalised by the end of the month.

CHAIR: When it is finalised, would you provide a copy?

Mr ANDERSON: Yes, if the committee agrees.

CHAIR: The council's submission referred to establishing a panel to monitor the effectiveness of feral animal control. Would you expand on that; who should be on that panel, and how would it work?

Mr LIVERMORE: That reference is to the feral animal working group that has been established in Tumbarumba. Part of the plan that Roger Anderson spoke about is being done as a control program but it is also being done as a monitoring program. It is a pilot program and the intention is to run it for 12 months so that we can evaluate its effectiveness. At the end of the day we should be able to come up with a true cost of control. At the moment there is not enough data to give us that information.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Your submission states that there was a huge blow-out in sheep losses between 2000 and 2001, a 350 per cent blow-out. You said it could have been far greater, but three local sheep producers had been forced to go out of running sheep as a result of those losses. You warned that potential losses to farmers would become totally unacceptable, and would be yet another catalyst for further economic decline in rural areas. Those comments indicate a very severe and worsening situation in your area. Is that correct?

Mr LIVERMORE: That certainly has been the case over the past 12 months or so. I have more figures which I would like to table today. They have been compiled by the Hume RLPB since my submission was prepared. One issue that we first identified when the group was originally formed is that traditionally reporting has not been accurate. There was a lot of anecdotal evidence about stock losses and that did not tally with the official reports given to the rural lands boards. One of the projects of the working group was to survey land-holders and ask them to come back to giving reports. We have gained a lot more information but we still do not have all the reports in. There is anecdotal evidence about losses, but that has not been included in any tables.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Therefore, are you saying that the figures in your report are inaccurate, because of poor figures, or that they have been put together since reasonably reliable figures have been available, say since 1997? Can we use these figures, or are they too rubbery?

Mr LIVERMORE: The figures in that submission would be way under the true indication. Since that submission was prepared, the working group has gathered more information. The figures I will table today give a better indication of stock losses over the last couple of years.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: During that large blow-out would you agree that the seasons were good?

Mr LIVERMORE: Yes, generally.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Not all of them.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: The main blow-out was between 2000 and 2001. Could it be that the traditional methods of controlling dogs and foxes are not being used, or has the feral animal population blown out?

Mr LIVERMORE: The evidence indicates that the numbers have escalated. I do not believe that there has been any reduction in control measures. One of the problems with control measures is that they have been reactive rather than co-ordinated. Generally, someone would have rung the rural lands board and said, "Last night I lost 50 sheep". The board's rangers would go there on that day or the next day and set out bait stations. I do not believe that there has been any dropping off in control. Probably there has been an escalation in control because many landowners employed private trappers in that period.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: It would appear from the comments in your submission that your specific area is facing really harsh economic consequences of the feral animal infestations. Would you agree with that?

Mr LIVERMORE: Yes, that is certainly the case.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Anderson, in your submission you commented that the pure dingo is a native dog that should be given a high conservation value. A couple of other submissions stated that the dingo is a litter-bearing animal rather than a single-bearing marsupial and, therefore, is really out of place in the ecology of a system of marsupial animals. What is your response to that? I am suggesting that the dingo is not really a true native Australian animal, but one introduced much later than the marsupials developed here.

Mr ANDERSON: That may be correct. I do not have the knowledge to give you an accurate answer. You said that it has been introduced later, but how much later? What constitutes a native animal? It has been here for several thousand years, so would that not allow it to be called a native animal? It is like people who move into a small community are not called locals until they have been there for 30 years. If their children are born there, they would be called locals.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The marsupial population evolved here, but the dingo did not. There is a school of thought that the dingo should not be considered as a native animal, but we will not dwell on that interesting point. Your submission mentions the buffer zones required between government-owned land and private land. How do you see that working in practice?

Mr ANDERSON: That is what we are establishing in our co-operative control program. A buffer zone will extend along the perimeter of the national park, starting from Khancoban and extending to near Tumbarumba.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Within the national park estate?

Mr ANDERSON: In Kosciusko National Park. A small area will become private land, and we are setting up base stations there under the auspices of the rural lands protection board. The tracks that the dogs frequent will be targeted for the base stations. The base stations will be set up by the rural lands protection board on private land and monitored by the land-holders and with the agreement of the land-holders. We then go into an area of private pine plantations and State forests. The manager of the pine plantation has undertaken to set up bait stations under the auspices of the rural lands protection board ranger and the manager will monitor the stations with assistance from the ranger.

We then move to the State Forests area and it is doing the same. It will set up bait stations which will be monitored. State Forests is also setting up transects to help identify animals travelling along certain routes and will get a knowledge of the number of wild dogs that travel across those transects. Some dogs will not take baits and will pass through this control barrier. Trappers will be employed to try to catch those dogs before they get out into the grazing areas.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is the greatest threat to the implementation of that co-operative approach?

Mr ANDERSON: Finance. From year one, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and State Forests have committed funds to the program for 12 months. We are getting very good support from them for that program. However, what we as producers are worried about, including members of the National Parks and State Forests, is that at the end of the 12 months we are going to look at the costs of the program. If we decide that it is very effective, but has cost us a lot of money, we will have to justify the money that they are spending to the higher authorities. That is where we need support from this inquiry. We need to inform the State Government that this is the real cost that it must bear, and it must be prepared to allocate extra funds to State Forests and National Parks for the implementation of co-ordinated co-operative control programs.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Previous witnesses have indicated that they have had a good working relationship with local personnel from State Forests and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. They have also indicated that local personnel have expressed frustration and concern about the lack of resources to be able to do this job properly. Is there a similar situation in your area?

Mr ANDERSON: To date we have had excellent support from the local NPWS and State Forests people. This is the first year of the implementation of the program and the funds have been committed. The program will be completed this year, but our greatest concern is what will happen in the future.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What are the implications to a grazier if he is forced out of a sheep enterprise in a particular area?

Mr BAUER: The implications would be quite huge on several fronts. I have some tables which would assist the Committee. Probably the first implication would be to the land value. If they were forced out of sheep and had to go solely to cattle and a few years down the track decided to sell their property, a prospective buyer would look at it and say that it is a cattle only property. That would be a lesser value, without a variety of enterprises. To switch from sheep to cattle involves a huge outlay, as you will see from the papers that I have just passed around, and I think that most farmers could not withstand the cash-flow problems that would come from such a change. Then there are also the infrastructure requirements for a place like mine that has only ever run sheep. Obviously you have got to build a set of cattle yards and improve all your fences to handle cattle.

There is also the fact that I have been running sheep virtually for 30 years and I am pretty good at it, and then you have to change what you do to get into a cattle run. That is all a new thing and that all takes time. You would probably lose out on a few opportunities along the way because you are not familiar with what goes on in the cattle world. I feel that I have been running sheep for 30 years and I have not really had a dog problem except for the past 12 months. A lot of people would be in the same position. In the Mannus Valley, the dogs have cropped up this year. Why should we have to change? What has gone wrong with the system. We have to fix the system to ensure that these feral dogs are not coming in. That is about the best way I can answer that question.

Ms WALKER: I would just like to elaborate on John Bauer's economic analysis. The paper you have in front of you refers to \$1 million. That was written by a person in Tumarumba who is very well known in the sheep industry. He is a big producer of fine-wool sheep and he is estimating the change at about \$1 million for his enterprise alone. However, what we have not touched upon today is the emotional problem and I do not know whether anybody else has done so before us. It certainly is very traumatic for sheep farmers who deal in superfine wool or for a person who has been involved in transplanting very high genetic embryos into their sheep to go out the next morning and find them terribly mauled. That is fairly traumatic for people. They do not go out and say, "Oh, I have lost a couple of hundred dollars here", they say, "Oh my gosh, it is still alive." That is what these people face day after day. These two people on my right, Mr Anderson and Mr Bauer, have been paying dog trappers out of their own pocket to try to stop the losses on their own place. It is a very serious problem in our area.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I wish to direct a very quick question to Mr Livermore. You mentioned the connection between weeds and feral animals. The control of weeds is of course a council responsibility. You have to put in submissions to the State Government to receive funding on an annual basis. Can you estimate what percentage of the funding, the grant that you receive, you would spend on paperwork to get that money?

Mr LIVERMORE: That is a very touchy point at the moment because the basis of grant applications in the Tumarumba shire for weed control is for blackberry and St John's wort and we have received no funding at all for that this year. We basically had our program for weed control— council control of land, roads and reserves and so on—just totally slashed.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: What did it cost to put in that application?

Mr LIVERMORE: I do not know. I cannot give you an exact figure on that but it takes a lot of hours and a lot of resources that go into not only doing the grant application but also doing the grant returns and reports for them on the yearly basis. A lot of time and effort goes into that. As I say, this year we got an increase in our inspectorial grant. Without being cynical about this, we might end up with some beautifully coloured maps of where the weeds are proliferating, but we will not have any money to actually go and control them. That is a massive problem for us as a control authority. The other point I should make is that we are the weed control authority for the Tumarumba shire but our authority does not extend to national parks and State forests.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: My question relates to an issue raised in the working group's submissions. I would like some comments from both the working group and perhaps Councillor Walker. My question relates to the issue of pig dogging. In the working group's submission, there is quite strong comment about the group's condemnation of some practices involved in that. I was wondering if someone from the working group would comment on whether you think that the practice of leaving the dogs behind has contributed to the increased

number of sheep losses through an increase in the number of wild dogs in the area. Part of the question that relates to the council is whether the council has taken any action to curb some of these pig dogging practices in the area. Are local people engaged in the practice, or are people coming from Canberra and other areas? If they are locals, has the council attempted to do anything pursuant to its responsibilities under the Companion Animals Act?

Mr LIVERMORE: I can probably respond to most of those points. There is some evidence of the dogs possibly being left behind by pig doggers. They have not actually been the dingo-type dogs but they have been dogs that had been caught killing sheep. These have been various hybrid, hunting-type dogs. That is a problem. The other problem with pig doggers is that there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that when they have hunted a lot of pigs out of an area, they actually restock the area with pigs. They bring more pigs back in to make sure that there is an ongoing supply of pigs in the forest for them to come to hunt. That is another major problem. In certain areas the National Parks and Wildlife Service is actually employing a private pig trapper to go in and do work to control pig numbers. He has had occasions when he has worked over a period of perhaps a couple of weeks baiting pigs and getting them into a certain area where he can trap them, and on the next weekend a crew of pig doggers will come up and sic the dogs onto them. The pigs once again will spread for miles back through the forest. Those people are interrupting these control programs that are happening.

In terms of council's issues under the Companion Animals Act, not only in the Tumbarumba area but also in other areas I have worked in, I suppose a large proportion of complaints about dogs that are received from urban areas reveal, when you go and check them out, that people with these so-called pig dogs or hunting dogs have five or six of the dogs cooped up in a back yard. From that point, you receive constant complaints about dogs barking because the dogs are in little cages and are on a two-foot long chain all day. There are also odour problems and so on. I had one instance in Tumbarumba when I had to serve a dangerous dog declaration in relation to a dog belonging to one young chap. The dog was getting out of the yard and attacking people. These matters are not so much related to the issues in the forest and so on, but there are other issues that emanate from the pig dogging practice particularly.

Mr ANDERSON: I wish to elaborate on the answer given to the Hon. Amanda Fazio. There are some local pig doggers but pig doggers are also coming 100 kilometres to 200 kilometres away from Wagga Wagga and Albury. Our group has asked State Forests not to issue the licences for pig dogging in their forests, and State Forests has agreed. We have informed the local police of what the group is doing and that has been referred to the police. Basically it is about trying to get more information within the community regarding control. Yes, there is evidence that after the pig dogs have survived in the forest for some time, they are then able to start attacking sheep if they move out. We have had evidence recently in the Mannus area of a dog eventually being trapped that was killing sheep.

Mr BAUER: I would like touch on the emotional effects of having sheep killed on your property. It is a very stressful thing, especially when you have sat up all night waiting for an attack to happen and it does not happen on that particular night. Then you have to go back to your family and you become a bit short after a while and the effect flows through the whole family. I will pass round a picture that shows that these are the sorts of things that we find in our paddock on the morning after an attack. It is not a good feeling to go out there and see such things.

(The witnesses withdrew)

KATHLEEN JUNE WESTON, Grazier, P. O. Box 243, Jindabyne,

RICHARD BOWRING MARTIN, Grazier, Willow Vale, Nass, Australian Capital Territory, and

SUSAN KATHRINE MITCHELL, Company Director, 151 Vale Street, Cooma, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Mrs Weston, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mrs WESTON: As the Region 11 Chairman for New South Wales Farmers and as Secretary for Snowy River Shire ratepayers.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mrs WESTON: Yes.

CHAIR: Mr Martin, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr MARTIN: As Chairman of the Queanbeyan-Canberra branch of New South Wales Farmers.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr MARTIN: I am.

CHAIR: Mrs Mitchell, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mrs MITCHELL: As Chairman of the Cooma District Council of New South Wales Farmers.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mrs MITCHELL: I am.

CHAIR: Do you wish your submission to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Mrs MITCHELL: Yes.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that, in the public interest, certain evidence or documents that you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede your request, but that decision may be overridden by a vote of the Parliament. Do you wish to make a statement?

Mr MARTIN: My object in putting this submission to the Committee was to bring to the notice of the Committee the fact that the Australian Capital Territory—which is where I come from—also has a dog problem. We are surrounded by New South Wales, so I guess that we have the same problems.

Mrs WESTON: My purpose in presenting this submission was to draw attention to the fact that there is a far wider and more complex issue than looking at feral animals in isolation.

CHAIR: Would you like to expand upon that statement?

Mrs WESTON: Feral animals are only part of the equation. You have to go back and look at the history of how it has developed. It has not developed overnight. There has not been recognition of how it began, more than 50 years ago with all the construction towns well into the high country of the mountains and workmen having domestic dogs, all sorts, sizes and breeds.² Stock was removed from the mountains, which removed the constant interaction of humans out of the mountains and brought it back into the periphery. In that 50 years the 800,000 hectares of the Kosciusko National Park has virtually become one paddock. I do not believe that there have been the resources or the management skills to identify what was happening, where it was happening and how it was

² Amended according to corrections provided ~ Kathleen Weston, 8 March 2002

happening. We have not been able to take control or implement preventive measures before it got out of hand. It is now out of hand.

The Committee's terms of reference worry me. Whilst they recognise that there are feral animals, the emphasis is not sufficiently on eradicating and controlling them up front. For God's sake, let us accept that there are feral animals. We all know what damage they are doing both to the native flora and fauna. Let us make sure that we do not waste any more time looking at the damage caused by them in order to justify that we are going to eradicate and/or control them. This is a serious and an emotional issue. Unfortunately, it has also become an economical issue. The costs that will be incurred in arriving at any sort of modest control will be astronomical. This will have to be ongoing. It is not something that people come along and do today and tomorrow and then say, "We have fixed the problem." The problem, which is embedded in the high country, will keep forcing itself out as long as farmers are able to sustain it. They have reached saturation point.

CHAIR: Are any of you able to quantify the extent of the problem of dog attacks—that is, attacks on sheep? Has land been withdrawn from grazing because of attacks?

Mrs WESTON: I cannot, but I believe that that has already been quantified in a number of instances and in a number of areas. There is no pattern to it. It can happen here today and somewhere else tomorrow. It is difficult to quantify something like that because it is all market related at a particular time. Genetics come into it, breeding comes into it and management comes into it. It involves a whole host of things. As I said earlier, this problem is not isolated. Everything is totally dependent on everything else. When you open one door you close another door. When you close one door you open another door. It is as simple that. We have to stop beating around the bush. We have to admit and recognise that there is a feral animal problem that is impinging on native animals and birds.

I was told yesterday of an incident in the high country where the ants are actually destroying the soil. They are building huge nests. The eggs of the birds that are nesting are full of ants. So, therefore, the ants are destroying the embryo in the egg before it has time to hatch. Apparently this is happening throughout the mountain area.

Mrs MITCHELL: Over the past 12 months the Cooma District Pastoral Protection Board obtained figures from August—which is when we wrote out our submission—which show that 3,400 sheep have been destroyed either because of dogs or by dogs. We attended a meeting with people from National Parks who were trying very hard to do something about this. I asked people to mark on the maps the areas from which they had removed sheep. Stupidly, I did not obtain those figures, but they are available. You might be able to get those figures from National Parks. So the farmers who were there actually marked on maps where they had moved sheep and where there had been dog attacks.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: When you are referring to 3,400 sheep are you referring to the whole of the Monaro area or the whole of the Kosciusko area?

Mrs MITCHELL: It would be in the Cooma and Bombala pastoral protection board areas. It would be within the Kosciusko National Park or bordering on the Kosciusko National Park.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Is Bombala over the escarpment?

Mrs MITCHELL: No, Bombala is south from here. It is on the eastern side of the Kosciusko National Park. It goes to the escarpment.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Are those figures for the 12 months preceding last August?

Mrs MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: You say that 3,400 sheep were killed?

Mrs MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: If 3,400 sheep were destroyed in that region in a 12-month period, how does that sit with the advice of the South Coast RLPB which had not received any reports of kills?

Mrs MITCHELL: I do not know. Perhaps the people on the South Coast are not reporting their losses. The district chairman of the New South Wales Farmers Association, at Bega, told me that there have been losses of sheep and cattle just recently. Within the past week a calf was found drowned in a dam and another calf, that was seen to be born one day, was found half eaten the next day. Perhaps people are not reporting losses to the board, or perhaps these losses have happened since. There are not very many sheep in the Bega Pastures Protection Board [PPB] area.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: How do New South Wales Farmers collect their figures?

Mrs MITCHELL: By asking me; by reporting it.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Reporting to whom?

Mrs MITCHELL: Largely the figures that New South Wales Farmers produce come from the PPB. We hear of other figures. Sometimes people will not report the kills to the PPB, because they think it devalues their land. If it is seen that land has suffered great stock losses, and the farmer is desperate to get out, he will go to the PPB to ask about the land.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: I understand that that is a deterrent. If the Committee is given figures, we have to find out how those figures are amassed, and whether they are realistic. Could you expand on that?

Mrs MITCHELL: I would like to expand on that. In the Monaro area, on this side of the mountains, National Parks has contracted someone to speak to people who say that they have suffered losses of sheep by dogs and have had to take stock out of their paddocks. The contractor is asking for the social and economic impact on farmers of that problem. Bruce Bashford, the rural councillor for the area, will carry out that survey for National Parks. That has come about as part of the strategy that New South Wales Farmers and National Parks have been involved in recently. The National Parks and Wildlife Service is really trying to do something about this and it is terribly important that each person is responsible for their borders and for the stock within their boundaries.

We have no idea of the amount of stock in the national park or the number of native animals and so on. The NPWS is about to do surveys. Earlier questions were asked about the quoll. NPWS has no idea, although it has done a couple of reports that were not accurate. They cannot be correct, because people do not know the implication of all this. They do half the study, but do not have the money to finish it. In the northern part of the park there is a guy who has been putting collars on dogs and letting them go. But they do surveys only every month or two, on the same day of the month. Because they find the dog in the same place they say that the dogs do not move, but they do not survey how far the dog has travelled in between. I am sure we all go home for dinner most nights, so do the dogs.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Earlier the Committee heard from representatives of the Cooma and Bombala boards. For the year 2000, Cooma had 592 sheep killed and Bombala had 1,565. The year before the numbers were 1,000 and 700. From where did you obtain your figures?

Mrs MITCHELL: I do not know, I would have to check. I did this some months ago. I would have gone through the figures and taken the bottom line. I will check them for you.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mrs Weston, could you comment on a farmer's legal requirement or responsibility if his sheep dogs stray onto a neighbour's property and kill his sheep.

Mrs WESTON: The legal ramifications are pretty severe. We can be prosecuted or charged for refunding the cost of whatever animals were destroyed. It is a serious responsibility and one that farmers do not take lightly. Farmers take great pride in looking after their stock and making sure that they do not stray onto their neighbour's land. That is part of the good neighbour policy and that is what we must develop; a good neighbour policy. The figures came from an ecological sustainable development review on land management with the Federal Government. In the whole of the nation only 13 per cent is freehold land, and 83 per cent is Crown land—fair enough!

Not all of that 83 per cent is purely public reserve, a lot is leased in New South Wales. The Western Division comprises 41 per cent. There seems to be an extraordinary emphasis on this feral dog issue that the farmer is at fault; whether that is wrong or right that is the way I perceive it. We can look after what is inside our fence

boundaries without any great difficulty, but when there is an intrusion and lack of responsibility and accountability from Government instrumentalities we pay the price. And we do pay the price.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: From a legal perspective, is it fair to say that you are liable for compensation if your dog kills your neighbour's sheep?

Mrs WESTON: That is correct.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is your understanding of the legal responsibility and requirement for the National Park and Wildlife Service when dogs under its control kill your sheep?

Mrs WESTON: To be honest, I have not read the National Parks legislation. It is my understanding that until comparatively recently, I am not sure whether it was 1993, that the Crown did not have the same legal responsibility to its neighbours as we have. I understand that in recent years there has been a recognition that if there are going to be huge tracts of public land there has to be comparable responsibility.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: In all the stock losses that have occurred as a result of dogs coming out of parks in this region, has National Parks ever paid any farmer compensation for those stock losses?

Mrs WESTON: I do not know. I can give a personal example of what happened to us. Our property borders a national park, on the Thredbo side of the river. We do not have a fence, we have a river. In drought conditions the river can get low. As a family we have always had a wonderful relationship with National Parks personnel, we live with them, we work with them, we socialise with them. It is not a bad interaction. We had a very good regional manager at that time. In drought conditions, when our stock strayed onto a national park, the manager would ring us and tell us to remove our stock—which we did.

On one occasion a deputy came in, and did not bother to tell us about our straying stock. He got two stock traps and loaded our cattle and took them to Bombala. We were told, from Bombala, that our stock were impounded there and asked to come and take possession. From memory that cost us a fairly significant sum. When the permanent director of National Parks came back and found out what happened he was absolutely livid. He said that that one example brought down relationships between National Parks and the neighbours, like nothing else.

When our stock stray onto the park they can be impounded and we are required to pay for them. My husband thought that he would be smart and in return he wrote a letter to National Parks and said, "Your bloody kangaroos are down here. If you do not come and get them I will take them to Bombala and impound them." We still have the kangaroos.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you believe that the exclusion of domestic livestock from the high areas within the park that were traditionally used for grazing has improved conditions for native flora and fauna?

Mrs WESTON: No.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Why not?

Mrs WESTON: From my observation, the Kosciusko National Park is self-destructive. There is a density of growth in both timber and grasses; in huge areas the grass has killed itself. It is lank, it is rank. If you lift it up you can see that it is mouldy underneath and that is why animals do not eat it. The animals cannot eat that unpalatable grass. The timber is wall to wall, a holocaust waiting to happen. The recent bushfires were a classic example of overcrowding and mismanagement of too large an area to be actively controlled. This will be perpetuated and will get worse.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: It reminds me of the Byadra fire. Mr Martin, your situation is different from most of the witnesses we have heard from today. Will you elaborate on the problems you have in the built-up areas of Canberra and Queanbeyan?

Mr MARTIN: I do not agree with you. Our problems relate to the Namadgi National Park, at the southern end of the Australian Capital Territory, it is a good third or quarter of the Territory. Our problems started when the graziers were taken off those areas, because they had been controlling the dogs. I have been there for 36 years and we did not see those dogs until fairly recently, perhaps the early 1990s. In about 1995 the dogs really hit. We do not have a land board, we have Environment and Parks and Conservation. They put on a dog trapper for a limited

period, but he was going to be taken off because of lack of funds. We went to the press and showed them a few photographs, copies of which I have for the Committee.

The Government then put the trapper on full time. From that time onwards we still have dog problems. I have some up-to-date figures on what is going on now. We personally have not had any dog problems for a number of years, but we do not face the park except for a very small area. There are other leases—and we are all leaseholders now—that border on the park and they are still getting problems. Basically our dog problem is not town dogs, if that is what you are getting at. I do not believe they are town dogs. There are dogs coming out of Namadgi National Park.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: You mentioned that you have not seen any dogs since 1995.

Mr MARTIN: Very rarely.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Since then there has been a proliferation of dogs?

Mr MARTIN: Yes. It got very strong from 1995 onwards. That is when we got going. We went to the department and they put the dog trapper on. They have done a good job.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: What do you think caused this proliferation of dog numbers around the time?

Mr MARTIN: I can only say that they were kept under control by the graziers up in those outer areas who were then slung off for various reasons, such as to make way for the park. The dogs came out there. I guess it is possible that the pig dogs get away and their owners do not pick them up. We have a lot of pig doggers through that area.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: If the graziers could control them up until 1995, say, why can the graziers not control them now?

Mr MARTIN: Because it is a fairly skilled operation, trapping dogs. I, for one, would not have the skills to do it. You need a highly skilled person to do it.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Are you saying that these skills have been lost?

Mr MARTIN: I do not know.

Mrs MITCHELL: The trappers are getting old.

Mr MARTIN: They are getting old, yes. Our trapper is currently seriously ill and he is a man of approximately 69.

Mrs WESTON: What has happened is that in the 50 years since the Snowy Mountains scheme first started, grazing has been taken out of the park. In those very early years of construction within the park, there was a lot of noise and activity and people movements in those areas and the dogs were a little bit intimidated. At that stage there was still plenty of wildlife and native life there, such as birds, kangaroos and whatever. But over the years the native animals have left the park because of the unpalatability of the vegetation that is there. The water is drying up and grasses are unpalatable. The kangaroos are coming out onto the periphery. There is not the noise and the background interaction to keep the dogs back in. They are coming out too. In 50 years, they have bred up to God knows what. I would not even begin to estimate.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So what needs to happen in the park to get the animals to go back in there?

Mrs WESTON: I honestly do not know. I truly do not know. I think there has to be a very strong and rigid eradication control on the periphery to get the ones that are constantly coming in.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Would the reintroduction of large grazing animals help, do you think?

Mrs WESTON: I just wonder how many people would go back to the park if they were given the opportunity these days because the regulations and controls would be astronomical. They would be unrealistic and I

am not sure whether the stock would eat the unpalatable vegetation that is there. It would take an awful lot of reclamation through hazard reduction and all sorts of things to get back to what it was 50 years ago. With the resources that are not being made available to us, or to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, to manage those areas they have got, I cannot see anyone giving that sort of finance back to rehabilitate the park, and there are too many radical conservationists who have not seen or understood that all land resources have to be managed. If they are not, you lose them. That is what has happened.

Mrs MITCHELL: If we take the dogs out of the periphery, what happens is that the younger dogs from packs inside come out. They get sent out and so they then come out. I do not think that we have done enough study. I think that we really do not know and that is why it was thought that we should be aerial baiting way back in the back of the park so that it would keep them in there. Once they come out and come onto people's private land, it is like going to McDonald's. They have an easy meal. It is a quick feed. I think that there is still a lot of work that needs to be done about that. Trapping on the perimeters in fact may be bringing them out. The National Parks and Wildlife Service is trying hard to do work on that. There is not enough proof of that situation, I believe.

Mr MARTIN: I wish to make a comment about stock figures. For as long as I have been involved in this issue, that has always been a vexed question—getting accurate figures. In some of the mountain country, I do not think it is possible to be 100 per cent accurate and say that the sheep were killed by the dogs. There is that problem that we have had in the Australian Capital Territory [ACT]. I have a report here that was put out by Environment ACT which I will hand up to the Committee. It has a graph of sheep losses since 1994 and the dog kills. Quite frankly I do not agree with the figures that they have got on the sheep losses at all. That is a constantly vexatious problem. In the ACT there is a pest officer to whom every dog attack or sighting is to be notified. He liaises with the trapper and they go out and do the job. As I say, we are pretty comfortable with the way that we are being looked after in the ACT. Sure, there are dogs here still, but it is nothing like the kills that were occurring earlier in the piece. It is a lot better.

CHAIR: That program is working, evidently.

Mr MARTIN: Pretty well. You always get complaints, of course. But, yes, I think it is pretty good. We are pretty happy with it.

(The witnesses withdrew)

SUSAN LITCHFIELD, Secretary, Monaro Landholders Wild Dog Committee, Wondallee, Numeralla,

JOHN EDWARD ALCOCK, President, Monaro Merino Association, Wondallee, Numeralla, and

ROBERT EDWARD MAGUIRE, Member, Rocky Plain Wild Dog Association, Jiliby via Cooma, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mrs LITCHFIELD: Yes.

Mr ALCOCK: Yes.

Mr MAGUIRE: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you wish your submission to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Mr MAGUIRE: I suppose so.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that, in the public interest, certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee will be willing to exceed your request, but that may be overridden by a vote of the Legislative Council. Do you wish to briefly elaborate upon your submission or make a short statement?

Mrs LITCHFIELD: Yes. I wish to elaborate on the Monaro Landholders Wild Dog Committee's submission by way of an overview. I was born in Sydney and have lived on the Monaro for 40 years. City people have a romantic vision of blue hills and native wildlife—a utopia—in our national parks but, unfortunately, this is far from the truth. Wild dogs, the top order predator in our national parks, are not a social subject in city or conservation circles. But believe you me, when one lives in a rural area near our national estate, the harsh reality of the imbalance between good conservation management and the lack of attention to pest species and predators becomes a reality. Our national estate is choked with weeds and woody weed undergrowth and is now not a suitable habitat for much of our native wildlife. Native wildlife prefer the sweeter feed that has grown on lands adjoining the national estate and consequently the wild dogs, which are hungry and overpopulated within the estate, are following native prey onto grazing land. Wild dogs hard now attempting to colonise in private land because that is where they get a feed.

Monaro families, the innocent victims, have suffered and continue to suffer losses to livestock which are unacceptable. We trade mainly as family farmers, proudly practising longstanding conservation and land management in this fragile, high-country environment. We cannot continue to sustain the pressure on family life, income loss and long hours of stress associated with wild dog patrol work because our freehold land is near or adjoins the national estate. The National Parks and Wildlife Service staff and their contractors, the rural land boards, continue to try, to the best of their ability, to contain wild dogs, but the dog is a smart operator. Together with rare species management and constraints, the national estate management staff are continually losing the battle. Management plans and strategies seem to preoccupy national estate managers, but delivery of the plans is feeble. We now feel that threatened species management is more important than the livelihood of the Monaro farmers.

We are told that we must work together on the dog problem, but let us not forget the neglect over the last 20 years that has led to a build-up of dogs in the breeding grounds that are not under our control. We, as landholders, ask that aerial baiting be reintroduced as a tool in inaccessible areas, away from known quoll colonies, and that trapping continue to be carried out and bait stations used where practical. I recently spoke to a respected adviser to the National Parks and Wildlife Service who believes that the only solution is to dog-fence the boundaries of all declared national estates. I agree with this proposal because good fencing is the key to good-neighbour policy. I ask that the citizens of New South Wales pay a tax levy to boundary fence all national parks. As national estate neighbours, we insist on the right to trade, that is, to run livestock as a living, without interference from wild dogs.

Mr ALCOCK: The Monaro Merino Association represents 25 merino studs and all commercial breeders of Monaro. With regard to economic losses of businesses that are on the Monaro, we believe that the merino wool industry is an intricate part of the economy of Monaro. Sheep and sheep meat produce approximately \$90 million for Monaro which is of huge benefit not only to the Monaro economy but also to the national economy.

I will just talk about the studs. Three of our leading fine wool studs have had dog predation in recent months, which we find totally unacceptable. The recent survey that was done by the wild dog committee revealed that 3,300 sheep have been lost. I think that is totally out of hand. We have some maps here which we will go through later on. Another issue that I want to refer to is the de-stocking of areas. An awful lot of areas in Monaro shire, the South Coast, Braidwood and on the other side of mountains are no longer running sheep. That is one of the reasons why dogs have continued to come in closer and closer. Once again we find that totally intolerable. The social and emotional things that farmers go through is absolutely terrible. We treat our sheep as if they are part of the family. It is really a blow when you find sheep that have been mutilated.

That is one of the hard things that we have to deal with. It is not so much their monetary value; it is the emotional side of things. The money is important, but the first thing you think of is the poor sheep. We have spent all those years buying good rams. Another issue that we are concerned about is the disease side of things. As you know, wild dogs have hydatids, which poses a threat to farmers. How would National Parks address a rabies outbreak in this country? The other thing I would like to touch on is pigs. They are out of hand in a lot of the national estate country. Once again, I wonder how authorities would address a foot and mouth outbreak or swine fever. So the disease side of things is important.

Environmentally, the pigs are doing an awful lot of damage in the high country. They are digging up a lot of the wether country and destroying a lot of the wild flowers. We are all very conscious of conservation and we feel that something needs to be done about the large numbers of feral pigs. I would like to refute some of the things that were said earlier about Bega Rural Lands Protection Board. An awful lot of losses have gone on in that area that relate to the control of feral animals in the Bega board. We might answer questions about that a little later. National Parks or the national estate needs to address the enormity of the feral animal problem. They need to allocate enough funding to address these enormous problems. It needs an enormous amount of funding to be able to address it.

Basically, we need a balance and the flexibility to be able to do something. Over the years when we were aerial baiting we were able to bait in strategic areas. We did not use a large quantity of baits but we were able to contain the dogs very well and I think we all lived in harmony.

Mr MAGUIRE: I would like to start with an update of the Snowy Plains area that I am here to represent and I will give you the facts as they are today. One grazier was game enough to take his sheep back to the Snowy Plains this year. If he discovers a dog attack in the next 10 minutes he could have them back on the road out. To date no dogs have killed his sheep but, according to the dog trapper, the feral animal exterminator, or whatever you want to call him, he has dispatched five dogs. He has poisoned two, trapped two and the two that he trapped have come past six bait stations. He has shot one dog. I have a copy of this information for you. I have copies of nearly everything that is going on in this area. He estimates that there are another 17 dogs in the area. He has signed a document to state that these figures are accurate.

Last year about four or five graziers took sheep up. The Macmillan brothers had over 200 sheep killed. When the first attacks occurred they saw that there were four dogs in the area. After they trapped and shot 14 dogs there were still four dogs in the area that they knew of. Last year in July, using the helicopter, we put out over 1,000 baits in the private country that we all own. In my opinion these dogs have come back in, or we did not get them. The year before that the chap who has his sheep up there now was hit. He lost some 60-odd sheep and they caught 13 dogs. That was in 2000. In 1999 I leased a paddock next door to our cattle run, which is 1,000 acres plus, and I put 600 wethers on it. The dogs got into them. There was no trapper. We tried to bait them. I pulled the sheep out and there were 60 short. That is as far as I can go back from my first-hand experience on the Snowy Plains.

Before that, from 1940 until the 1970s there were no dogs on the Snowy Plains. These maps that I have brought you show what were the snow leases. Every one of those little paddocks represents someone's lease. The clear country on the maps shows land that was prohibited from grazing. There was somebody there to tend to the stock and to catch the pigs. We used to love catching pigs. It was a lot cheaper than buying them. The dogs did not exist. In 1967 to 1969 when Dr Graham Edgar closed the park—and I have a copy of his report here—there were no dogs in that area. In 1975 they shut down the permissive occupancies, which are the red blocks on the map. The light coloured blocks on the map are the snow leases. They shut the whole thing down. Then the dogs started to appear.

Dr Edgar, in his report, said that there were going to be a lot of problems with illegal grazing. They had problems with illegal grazing and the pigs were starting to spring up. The dogs then mysteriously appeared. Quiet yellow dogs in vast numbers turned up all over. In 1982-83 there was a drought. I took out a permit to take cattle

through the park. In the Tantangara and Kiandra areas there were yellow dogs and pigs everywhere. The whole situation has got out of hand. We are trying to do something about it with National Parks but it is a bit too late. In all those little areas, the other main thing that we did, apart from keeping down the pigs and looking after our sheep, was to burn some of the area every year, just as the black fellows did years ago. We did not burn the lot and it did not get out of control, but we burned patches.

The wildlife was there. Around every horse paddock there were kangaroos and wallabies. They are not there any more. There is no wildlife in the park. In 1983, when I took the cattle through that area, there were dogs for bloody miles. That is why they have now come across the river, into the Snowy Plains and everywhere else. At a place called Yaouk they have not had sheep there for 10 years. The sheep are gone. There are no attacks in that area any more as there are no sheep. They have sold the country to hobby farmers and whatever. The year 1981 was the last year, to my knowledge, that any prescribed burning took place in Kosciusko National Park. That was advertised in the *Cooma Express* on 3 March 1981. I have copies of that article for you. That fire got out of control. The build-up of fuel since stock has gone out has been massive. That aspect cannot be excluded from this inquiry. The pigs love jungle and that is what is being created. I am sure that we would be in the greatest dilemma if we had a fire in that area. The Sydney fires that occurred recently would look like a boy scout's camp fire compared with that area. It is not if, it is when.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: My question relates to the submission that we received from the Monaro Landholders Wild Dog Committee, which claims that 3,300 sheep were killed last year. I would like to go over the way in which those figures were arrived at. Could you expand on that?

Mrs LITCHFIELD: I certainly can. Over the years it has been hard to substantiate what has been going on. Out of sheer frustration, last April we formed this land-holders group. A pretty good statistician and several others put these figures together. We did a survey and we were constantly told that we did not know what was going on. So we, as a small group of people, conducted a survey which we paid for out of our own pockets. We surveyed 142 land-holders. We had 65 replies and those are the figures, which are accurate. I will swear to God that those figures are accurate. Now those figures are being questioned in all quarters. National Parks is unhappy with them because they say we surveyed specific people. But what are we supposed to survey? Are we supposed to survey flies going up a wall?

This was a survey that stood up. Three thousand sheep have been killed. The cost to land-holders on average was \$7,580. You might query those figures which might not be easy to substantiate. So there has been over \$1.75 million in losses. At least 24,000 hectares of grazing country is out of production or it has a reduced earning capacity. That is a very conservative figure. We know that a lot more country than that is out of production, but we have to substantiate something. Those were the figures that came in. If you want to question those figures we have all the paperwork at home. The average area of affected farms not able to be fully utilised is 548 hectares. That is pretty irrelevant, but they are the figures. We are now being queried about them, but we can substantiate them through the people who filled out the forms and we have kept their evidence. A socioeconomic study was commissioned. We believe it was commissioned in December but nothing has been done yet because I do not think the money has come through for it. That will cover the same ground again.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Do you know by whom?

Mrs LITCHFIELD: By our rural counselling service. National Parks asked Mr Bruce Bashford from our rural counselling service to do a survey of land-holders adjoining national parks.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: For the benefit of the Committee could you give us some information? Of that 548 hectares of lost country what, on average, would be the carrying capacity of that country? Can you just explain the term "carrying capacity" for the benefit of the Committee?

Mrs LITCHFIELD: "Carrying capacity" is how we relate a sheep to the area it can run on. The good carrying capacity on the Monaro is probably four sheep to an acre, going back to one sheep to an acre. The higher country that adjoins the park is the better fine wool growing country. A conservative estimate would be one sheep to an acre.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Which would be 2½ to five sheep a hectare. So we can use that as broad base figure.

Mrs LITCHFIELD: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: When you talk about fine wool sheep could you just explain that term also? Could you tell the Committee how much wool each of those 2½ sheep per hectare will yield?

Mrs LITCHFIELD: I might ask our stud breeder to answer that question.

Mr ALCOCK: It varies a bit because of environmental issues; sheep vary a bit with the wool cut. Unfortunately, most of the country has been put out of production and the Monaro is highly suitable for fine wool production. That is about 4.5-5.0 kilograms of wool per sheep,

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So, he is running 2½ sheep per hectare and is cutting five kilos of wool per sheep. What is the current value of that wool?

Mr ALCOCK: The wool market has picked up, but it varies from time to time because of the indicator. Most of the better wools, 18 microns or less, would be somewhere in that category.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: That is \$18 a kilogram, times five, times 2.5. That is the sort of production we are talking about?

Mr ALCOCK: That is correct.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The average cost per land-holder is \$7,500 includes the cost of lost wool production and also labour and dog control, does it not?

Mrs LITCHFIELD: Loss of income.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: That is before the latest wool market increase and it would be a lot more now.

Mr ALCOCK: When I referred to the \$90 million that the sheep industry is worth in the Monaro, that is a fairly conservative figure.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Can you comment on the comparative return when comparing sheep to cattle? If you remove sheep from that 548 hectares, on average again, what return would you expect? How would that compare to the potential wool production from those areas?

Mr ALCOCK: Historically sheep have been a long way in front of cattle. More importantly a lot of the country that goes out of production is not suitable for cattle. I know that the Bega Valley used to have a lot of sheep and because of dog predation it has gone out of sheep. Fortunately they can run cattle. It is the same on the other side of the mountain, but the Monaro is a little different. A lot of the high country is suitable for sheep only.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Maguire, could you expand on that. In your submission you said that your 580 hectare block at Snowy Plain, where 600 sheep were lost, remains unstocked to this day. Are you running cattle on it?

Mr MAGUIRE: No, they do not want cattle, only sheep.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is the annual cost to you with that block remaining unstocked?

Mr MAGUIRE: On the wool cut that you would get, reminding you that sheep are there only for six months of the year, would be \$20,000. So half of that; that is \$10,000 that I am not getting for an outlay of \$2,000. It cost me \$2,000 for the block. Further, people on Snowy Plain have rung me to see if I will run cattle on their blocks because they will not take sheep back. It is out of control. I forgot to mention about the pigs, and the trapper estimates that there are between 150 and 200 pigs in the area where he is dogging. When I counted my cattle into our block I kept falling over because the pigs have rooted it all up, and the footing was uneven. The problem with the pigs is that it takes four or five years for the ground to regenerate; it does not come back overnight.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Mr Alcock, you mentioned hydatid, and I come from an hydatid area. Will you explain to the Committee that it is not confined to dogs and the ramifications for communities. What controls did you put on, that have been circumvented by the dogs?

Mr ALCOCK: One of our major concerns is that feral dog populations carry hydatid, as do the foxes. Land-holders spend a considerable amount of money on dogs to protect our children and ourselves from hydatid. Dogs being allowed to roam are a real contamination threat. Another worry is that a lot of tourists go to the camping areas where there is a real risk. Anyone can pick up hydatid from dogs that gather around camping areas.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Earlier you mentioned attacks in the South Coast RLPB area. During the break a lady told me that she had lost stock in that area, including calves. You indicated that you have further information on that.

Mr ALCOCK: Yes. We are one of the very old families in the Bega Valley, we have been there since the early 1800s. Traditionally that has been a sheep area. People in attendance today have lost sheep and I can show you a photograph of a sheep that was killed recently. The only reason why people have dogs is because of the lack of work carried out in the Bemboka area which has allowed dogs to come up over the top and into that property. I live on the eastern escarpment and we have still sheep only because we have an electric fence. The mound baiting that has been carried out has worked well for us because of that electric fence. Unfortunately, the fence has ends, and people have had their dogs speared into them.

Other people have been driven out of sheep. In 1987-88 people started losing considerable numbers of sheep. In about 1994 they were finally driven right out of sheep, because of dog predation. They could no longer suffer the losses. People in the Scotland Yard area, further towards Bega way, were driven out of goats for the same reason. A lot of sheep in the area have gone, purely because of the dogs. In the Desert Creek area, around Brogo, the dogs come right through onto the Monaro. It is remote country. We used to live in harmony with the dogs, because we were allowed to do baiting. That was very successful, because the baits can be dropped from the air onto the barren ridges in remote areas where the dogs breed.

That proved to be very successful on the eastern side of the Monaro. That is a simplistic way to control those animals, there is nothing complicated about it. All we need is flexibility and balance. The map I have indicates areas that have been destocked, which goes against what the Bega RLPB said earlier.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Mrs Litchfield, one of your recommendations is dog-proof fencing. Is there a single form of fencing, and do you have costings?

Mrs LITCHFIELD: There are various forms of fencing and the costing is high. It is probably a simplistic way of looking at things, but we have been going around in circles for 15 years and got nowhere. The park advisers said today that the simplest way would be to fence the whole thing in, which we would love.

Mr ALCOCK: Some country that has been destocked over the years includes the Krewarree area. Traditionally that had sheep and I think it is in the Braidwood board area now. I remember that there were a lot of sheep in that area, but they have been forced out. Fortunately they have been able to run cattle. There used to be sheep throughout the Belowra Valley, and they lived in harmony. The dogs were kept back by baiting and trapping. In the Yowrie area behind Cobargo there were sheep, but it is destocked and cattle run there. Earlier someone said that there were no reports of stock losses, but they are dairy farmers whose cattle have been chased. So there is loss of production and there have been reports of calves being killed. If you get rid of the sheep the problem still goes on.

In the Badja area recently people have been forced to destock the country. If that last farmer moves, the dogs would get through to Canberra through the Tinderry range. It is an enormous problem. This is an intolerable situation that needs to be fixed before it pushes everyone out. A few days ago I received a report from the other side of the mountains where some kids were jacked up with a pack of dogs. I see that as a real serious problem. We should not have to wait until someone is killed before action is taken.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: People have spoken about high country leases and control of dogs and weeds, et cetera. Is your real concern that a fire through there would cause damage to the national estate greater than it would be under the previous conditions, because it burns so hot?

Mr MAGUIRE: That is exactly what I fear. Anyone who knows anything about the mountains has the same fear. NPWS has not been able to do any reduction burning because it is too far gone. That is the problem. While there is a huge load of fuel the water is not getting into the streams. The Eucumbene Dam has not been full for years. I lease 2,500 acres on the Eucumbene Dam, and it is going up and down only a little each year. We are losing ground; fire is a real fear to me. In 1965, when the fire went through from Rules Point, it was stopped on

grazed country within the park. In 1983, when the fire went from Tantangara Dam to Anglers Reach, it was stopped on grazed country outside the park—but there is no grazing in the park now.

To my knowledge, you could not physically stop a fire if it has been going for more than a day. The Rules Point fire of 1965 jumped from Sawyers Hill to Connors Hill; that is 4.5 kilometres. Dead birds fall out of the air. It all goes hand in hand with pigs, dogs and fire. The fire situation has not been addressed, and I do not know that it can be. Until stock are put back into the park, we have a real problem.

Mrs LITCHFIELD: I will take one minute, just for an overview. We were hoping to fly around the area, but the weather has been against us. For the sake of members of the Committee who are not familiar with the geographical area that they are in, I point out that we in the Monaro, which consists of three shires, are surrounded by one million hectares of national estate made up of seven national parks and 30 nature reserves. It takes pretty good men to manage that huge area. We battle to manage our private country. I submit that the land grab for national parks is out of hand—I think that many National Parks and Wildlife Service staff are good; I am not against them. Management is totally out of hand because the National Parks and Wildlife Service does not have enough staff. How can NPWS possibly manage when you have got such areas?

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: My question relates to a matter that has been brought up but we really have not expanded on it, that is, the emotional impact on families and communities. Perhaps Mrs Litchfield will give us her thoughts and experience on what sort of impact it has from a stress and emotional point of view when she and her family find animals that have been attacked by dogs?

Mrs LITCHFIELD: As I said, in this area we are mainly family farmers. We become very attached to our animals, as John Alcock said. We take great pride in our livestock and they are almost part of the family. To go out in the early morning and see sheep torn apart with their guts hanging out and everything else and have to take children along and look at that is extremely stressful. I think it is the emotional side of it that is as bad as the bank balance side. It certainly knocks your earnings around. Banks are not interested because we cannot guarantee that our land is free from predators. As Susan Mitchell from the New South Wales Farmers Association said earlier, it devalues our land. We are in trouble and we cannot see an end to it. We would like the Committee to look very closely to see if it can reorganise things a little better. We are big earners. I think it has been said that Monaro alone earns \$90 million just from livestock, but that industry is slowly being choked in this area.

(The witnesses withdrew)

PETER JOHN SOUTHWELL, Deputy Chair, Yass Rural Lands Protection Board, P. O. Box 10, Yass, and

BILL MORRIS, Dog Trapper, Yass Rural Lands Protection Board, P. O. Box 10, Yass, affirmed and examined.

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr SOUTHWELL: I am here as a member of the Yass Rural Lands Protection Board and also as a member of the National Parks and Wildlife Service advisory committee, south-west region.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of the inquiry?

Mr SOUTHWELL: Yes.

Mr MORRIS: Yes.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that, in the public interest, certain evidence or documents which you may wish to present should be seen or heard only by the Committee, the Committee will be willing to accede to your request, but that may be overridden by a vote of the Legislative Council. Do wish to make a statement?

Mr SOUTHWELL: Yes. I have been on the Yass Rural Lands Protection Board for about 13 years. I recently resigned from being the chairman of the board and I am now the deputy chairman. During the period when I was chairman, we did a lot of work on dog control and that work has continued for some time. I will provide historical background information on what happens in the Brindabella and Wee Jasper areas. I wish to talk about a plan that we have developed over the past 14 months. Wild dog attacks upon domestic stock in the Brindabella and Wee Jasper valleys is not a recent issue. Private land managers have managed extensive areas of bushland within the valleys from the mid-1800s. Native dog presence in the Brindabellas was documented by Gale in 1903. Trapping was regularly undertaken during grazing of snow leases from the mid-1800s to the 1960s. Wild dog management activities, such as trapping, fencing and poisoning, were regularly undertaken in the Wee Jasper area in the 1930s. State Forests has managed a significant area of both native and softwood forest in the valleys from the mid-1930s.

The Kosciusko National Park was gazetted in 1967. From 1979 to 1987 Bill Morris was a full-time trapper for the then Wild Dog Control Board. From 1988 to 1994 Bill Morris was trapping full time for the Yass Rural Lands Protection Board. Much of the bushland area at that time was private or vacant Crown land. More recently, in 1996 and 2001, significant areas of bushland have been gazetted as national park or nature reserve and are now managed by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. That will give the Committee an idea of where we are coming from.

The objectives of the plan that we have spent a lot of time on are to maintain a representative group of private and public land managers to co-ordinate wild dog and fox management activities in the Brindabella and Wee Jasper valleys. The wild dog and fox working group was overseeing that. Another objective is to monitor the program to ensure that an effective evaluation of the control activities can be undertaken during the implementation of this plan. Another objective is to ensure that management-level support is provided and maintained by each public land manager to allow implementation of an updated control program for the following operational period

The Brindabella and Wee Jasper Valleys Wild Dog and Fox Working Group was established as a result of the National Parks and Wildlife Service south-west slopes regional advisory committee's meeting which was held in Wee Jasper on 9 November 2000. The meeting with local land-holders identified the need for a representative group of land managers across all tenures to effectively cost and implement wild dog control works in the valleys. The land-holders identified a high level of support for a working group that not only would meet to formulate a plan but also would then directly oversee the implementation of the plan in the field. We were the ones who would oversee it right from the word go. The working group first met at Wee Jasper on Monday, 18 December 2000. The knowledge base was provided by the formation of a working group and allowed the following issues to be accurately plotted on operational maps: historical locations of wild dog attacks, access routes and trails utilised by wild dogs, a review of the current operational area and historical control practices in those areas, proposed target areas for future control, and existing and potential wild dog habitats.

The proposed control methods included evaluation of the working group's membership, mapping of all historical attack sites and wild dog access routes, evaluation of available control methods, and approval of proposed

bait station locations by all land managers. The working group agreed on best practice bait station techniques for all tenures across the eastern side to coincide with the practice of baits being buried 15 centimetres below the ground, et cetera. Proposed bait station locations are to be approved by all land managers. Land-holders are to sign letters of authority for the program to operate on private lands. We have had letters drafted so that all the occupiers of the land are fully conversant with exactly what was going on. Bait stations are to be established by the working group and monitoring sites are also established. There is a four-week free baiting period that is undertaken to identify the presence of target and non-target species. We want to see what is in there before we really get carried away. Poison baits are to be replaced every two weeks to ensure that toxicity for target species is correct. There are to be 1080 co-operative signs put up by the working group. We have brought along one of the signs to show the Committee.

After all that, poison baiting was to commence at bait stations. The stations are to be checked weekly. Trapping is to be implemented for bait-shy target species. For animals that do not want to take poison baits, trapping is available as well. The data will be recorded for each bait run, which is a very important step for future reference. Data sheets are to be collated by the Yass Rural Lands Protection Board. Land-holders are to be given updates and provided with feedback on programs at quarterly land-holders meetings. We were keeping the land-holders informed at all times of what is happening. The program is to be evaluated and amended as required during the implementation of the plan. We are not so sure about everything being exactly right. It is a living plan and it could take any improvements or changes at any time.

The old co-operative program that we had in place went something like this. Historically, this is how we used to look after our dog problem. We would have a wild dog attack. The Yass Rural Lands Protection Board would be notified by the land-holder. The rural lands protection board would then contact the National Parks and Wildlife Service and State Forests. A trapper would inspect the site to see what was going on and he would attempt to sort out where the dogs were coming from. Adjoining land managers would be contacted to improve reactive control measures. Private land reactive controls were implemented immediately. In other words, we would go onto private land and implement this dog control reasonably soon.

National Parks and Wildlife Service or State forest land required approval. We had to go through the channels and get approval for the work to be carried out on those lands. We had to get approval for the funding of those works to be done as well. That sometimes took quite some time to happen. Of course then the dog problem had accelerated quite a bit. Then we get to the trapper implementing the controls. So we decided we had to shorten that procedure and try to get it working a lot better. If we have a wild dog attack now the Yass Rural Lands Protection Board is notified by the land-holder. National Parks and State Forests receive wild dog incident reports via fax. A trapper inspects the property. Straightaway the trapper implements reactive control measures. We put all the tools in place so that the trapper can go and do the job that day if necessary.

A key part of our interest was in the monitoring of what was going on. We had to measure what was happening. We needed to see what was going on, say, further into the park. With that in mind we established a monitoring site. There are four 25-kilometre transects with sand pads placed every kilometre. Within the 25-kilometre transects there are two five-kilometre transects with sand pads, each 200 metres, to identify presence, absence, response of smaller animals, et cetera. Two transects are within the wild dog-fox control area and two transects are outside the wild dog-fox control area—nil treatment areas, so to speak. So we should be able to get a good handle on what is happening in and out of our control areas.

Some of our people do scat collection and they go for analysis to help determine what the dogs are eating and what they are doing. Stock losses will continue to be monitored throughout the existing reporting system. Target and non-target species and activity at bait stations are all recorded. All these control methods are consistent with recommendations outlined for areas where tiger quoll are likely to be present, or whatever. So we have tried to take into consideration the ramifications of our bait stations. The reporting bait station data sheets are collated and summarised by the Yass Rural Lands Protection Board [RLPB] for each quarterly working group meeting. Data is sent by Yass RLPB to National Parks, Queanbeyan, State Forests, Tumut and also to the Department of Agriculture. Peter FLEMING is doing a lot of work in collating this information.

I refer now to monitoring and evaluation. The working group meetings will evaluate the progress of the control program. The accuracy of program costings is important. Bait station data will be collected. The monitoring transects are in place. Patrol days are utilised. We have four patrol days when Bill can do work in these baiting areas. He also has a spare day for reactive work. There are wild dog activity reports, land-holder feedback, program promotion, program reports and program amendments as a result of new innovations. I believe that the benefits of this co-operative program are: a more efficient and effective utilisation of resources. The trapper has regular

programmed employment. Trainees and land managers have an opportunity to skill share. Land-holders know when the trapper is due to return to their area.

Land-holders acknowledge the importance of wild dog activity reports. As I said a moment ago, the patrol day every week allows trappers to respond to activity reports. We have the best practice use of 1080 implemented across all tenures. As you know, there is an inquiry into the use of 1080. If we lose 1080, we are fearful what problems will arise. It is important that we keep that in perspective and try to do the right thing on every occasion. Accurate costings allow the identification of the real cost of wild dog-fox control—a difficult issue. We have updated our information on that issue several times. It is quite an expensive exercise, but if we perform that exercise well it will become cheaper for everybody. All land managers are aware of co-operative programs that address wild dog-fox issues.

I believe that one of the best programs that we have is improved relations on the ground between National Parks, State Forests, land managers and the RLPB. We took the brunt of the dog attacks. At this point in time, relations are excellent and co-operation is really good. I think this program will proceed very well. I refer now to the essential things that are required for the success of the Brindabella and Wee Jasper program. These include: realistic expectations of the working group or land-holders. In other words, we cannot be unrealistic about what we think we can achieve. We must provide support for all land managers involved in the program. We also require continued funding and support from public land managers in that area.

Another essential issue includes adherence to guidelines. This includes bait burying at the right depths and all those sorts of things. Another issue is the minimisation of potential non-target species. We must keep that important point in mind. We also require resources to maintain and monitor transects. It is important that we know what is going to happen, what could happen and how we can change things to make them better. We also require balanced, positive and accurate media exposure. The media must be given the right picture. We do not need the wrong story going out; we need the right story of what is happening and what we are doing about it. Co-operative plans are the way to go in the future for pest animal control.

We require sound planning, sound funding and co-operation from all parties, including politicians and Treasury. It is important that Treasury becomes an understanding partner in this. Without funding the program will not work. I believe we can achieve a satisfactory result in the medium to long term. There is one other issue that I would like to bring to your attention. I believe that we are facing a crisis at this point in time in training people who can do work on the ground. We need a fully funded training course for our wild doggers or pest animal officers. These people can be employed across a wide area. They can be employed in forestry, National Parks and in Rural Land Protection Boards. If we do not do something about training in the next five or six years we will lose people like Bill. We will lose their skills and those skills will not be passed on. It is important for you to take that matter into consideration in your deliberations.

CHAIR: Can we have a copy of those documents?

Mr SOUTHWELL: Yes, I have a copy that I will give to you.

CHAIR: It sounds as though this program has already been successful as you have reduced the number of dog attacks in the area.

Mr SOUTHWELL: I will let Bill answer that question as he is the fellow on the ground.

CHAIR: How does the mound baiting compare with other forms of control?

Mr MORRIS: It has only been going full time for the last 12 months. The co-operation that we have had from forestry and National Parks in our area has been terrific. There has been a vast increase in the number of dogs in the area. Last year I caught twice as many as I normally catch. Just where they are coming from and how they are getting there is a controversy. Certainly last year was the worst year for dog numbers. But the losses are not as great as they used to be because I spend more time in the bush and more time on control. I am doing more proactive work. The mound baiting is effective only to a degree. A lot of dogs will not take baits. So trapping is essential. Trying to combine both is sometimes difficult. We need more funding so that we can get more people on the ground to do this work. The area that I have now is too big for one bloke. We could use another full-time man there. That applies right round the national parks. We need more full-time people on the ground. It would certainly ease the situation.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Mr Southwell, you gave us an outline of the plan that you have embarked upon. What is that plan in response to? What is the history of stock losses in your area and the proliferation, in particular, of dogs? Can you give us an outline of the history of the area?

Mr SOUTHWELL: The dogs that have been caught and destroyed each year have been somewhere around 50 or 60 per annum. That has been going on for quite some time.

CHAIR: How long—20 years?

Mr SOUTHWELL: It is probably longer than that.

Mr MORRIS: I have been involved for 22 years and I averaged about 50 a year in that time.

Mr SOUTHWELL: So there is quite a history of dog attacks in that area. What brought it to a head for us was the fact that ratepayers went crook. Finally they ended up in the boardroom at Yass Rural Lands Protection Board and they demanded that something be done. At that time everyone thought that the protocols we had in place were quite adequate. We decided at that time that they were not and we had to have another look at them. That is when we embarked on this new plan. A lot of the impetus for that came out of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. They had a keen interest in getting on top of this problem. The public pressure from all the members and bodies around there actually created this plan.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Did the people who came to you and who went crook furnish you with any stock loss figures?

Mr SOUTHWELL: Yes. We have the stock loss figures at the rural lands protection board.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Could you let us have those figures?

Mr SOUTHWELL: They are actually in the document that we have just given you.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: How are those figures arrived at?

Mr SOUTHWELL: A property owner is asked to furnish a report on the activity of his property. For example, he may have a dog attack, three sheep are killed, four are mauled and three dogs are sighted. That report comes into the board office and it is collated there.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Mr Morris, you mentioned that you had trapped a record number of dogs in the last 12 months. Have you any idea what might be the cause of that? Have you noticed any difference in the type of dogs? Are they the same sort of dogs that you have always been catching and trapping, or do you think that there is more cross-breeding with abandoned pig dogs or whatever? It seems as though there has been a big increase in numbers. It might be because you are being more effective in the way in which you are dealing with them. However, there might be some other cause for this population increase that you have seen recently. Do you have any ideas about that?

Mr MORRIS: It could be that they are eating themselves out of the areas that they are living in. So they are moving out to where there is more food. Around the fringes of the park and on private property there tend to be more macropods. The type of dog really has not changed much in the 20 years that I have been involved. There is perhaps a bit more variation in colour and more bob-tailed dogs are turning up. I do not know what that means. The results of the DNA testing that we are doing might tell us something on that score.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Mr Morris, you have been a trapper for 22 years. What background was required before you embarked on trapping? Peter mentioned earlier that people would need training and that it would be hard to find trappers. How would you go about training a dog trapper?

Mr MORRIS: It would not be difficult to train them. It is just getting someone who has an interest in the job. That is the problem. There are plenty of blokes about. The reason you do not have many on the ground is that there is no job security and no funding to get them involved in a career in that area. Mostly we have just had blokes who have had some ability to catch dogs on a casual basis. There has never been enough money to encourage people to stay in the business. I am sure that, if there was enough funding, we would have no trouble in getting those men a full-time job.

CHAIR: What are your views on aerial baiting?

Mr MORRIS: It has certainly proved very effective in the past. When aerial baiting stopped that was partly the reason that the dogs spread to the Wee Jasper and Brindabella area. We did not have many dogs there prior to 1972. That was the first time I saw a dog there. In earlier years there were a few, but that was back in the days when aerial baiting was being carried out. It kept them under control a bit.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: After all the work that you have done in that field in recent years have you seen any evidence of quolls on bait mounds and things like that? Do you believe that there has been a significant impact on quolls as a result of aerial baiting? One of the main reasons that aerial baiting was stopped was the fear of the impact on quolls. There is some doubt about the authenticity of that information.

Mr MORRIS: Most of my time has been spent in an area where there have not been many quolls. Certainly at the bait stations I have not seen many quolls. There were a lot of quolls in the Krawarree area, at the top of the Shoalhaven. John Comans used to find quolls there, and I came across them in the time I was there. That area had been heavily baited by hand and also from the air.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Luncheon adjournment)

ANTHONY IAN FLEMING, Director, Southern, National Parks and Wildlife Service, 6 Rutledge Street, Queanbeyan,

DAVID GEORGE DARLINGTON, Regional Manager, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Kosciusko Road, Jindabyne, and

STEPHEN HORSLEY, Regional Manager, South West Slopes, National Parks and Wildlife Service, 7A Adelong Road, Tumut, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Dr FLEMING: Yes.

Mr DARLINGTON: I am.

Mr HORSLEY: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Do you wish your submission to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Dr FLEMING: Yes.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents that you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request, but that may be overridden by the Legislative Council. Do you wish to make a short statement?

Dr FLEMING: Yes. I understand that other members of the Service will be seeking to appear before the Committee in other parts of the State, including the Director-General. Therefore, it is my intention to focus on southern New South Wales. I will run through a series of overheads to give a picture of the feral animal control programs that operate in southern New South Wales. The map gives an indication of the area that I refer to as the Southern Directorate. The resources involved in this management include our staff and contractors. We have the equivalent of 33 NPWS staff involved in both weed and feral animal control. We have a number of work centres. Our directorate is divided into four regions.

With the South West Slopes region there are work centres at Queanbeyan, Tumut and Holbrook. There are work centres in the Snowy Mountains area, the far South Coast and the South Coast. We work closely with the Rural Land Protection Boards and in a number of cases contract them to undertake work on our behalf in relation to foxes, wild dogs and feral pigs. Conservatively our budget is \$3.5 million this financial year of which a significant proportion goes on staff salaries and a large amount is for operating costs including the important contracts we have with RLPBs.

This year the budget increased significantly. The overhead gives a break-up of operating costs between different feral animals. The figures are consistent with the overall Service submission. Since that submission was presented to the inquiry there has been a further increase. The main contracts we have in place on the South Coast involve RLPBs and State Forests. The South Coast RLPB runs from Nowra to the Victorian border, where it is a wide range of baiting programs. They provide some of the locations. The Kosciusko region is of the most interest today.

Wild dogs in Kosciusko is a very complex issue, certainly the most difficult land management issue that I have had to face, and continue to face. There are obvious and significant problems with stock losses, but there are some success stories. The Service is very committed to all possible avenues to deal with that problem not only because of stock losses but also because of the park management. Programs. Around Kosciusko areas include Byadbo and Snowy Plain, Khancoban, Yaouk-Adaminaby, Goobragandra, Brindabella-Wee Jasper, Woomargama, and the Bombala south-east forest area.

Over the past couple of years we have looked at a number of new initiatives and have expanded a number of programs. At Byadbo we have developed a very extensive mound baiting program which goes quite deeply into the park and is regularly serviced. It has achieved significant results. Since the Byadbo program commenced, we have developed an initiative jointly with the New South Wales Farmers Association to develop an advisory panel to look

further into the techniques that are available to address aerial baiting, in a controlled technique. I acknowledge the important role that the Farmers Association has played in prompting and prodding us. It has kept us on our toes. There is a lot of work still to be done. We are working cooperatively with that association and the farmers it represents.

As a result either directly or indirectly of that panel process, there has been an increase in wild dog expenditure. The operating cost is close to \$700,000 and I suspect that is a conservative estimate. We have employed additional staff to work specifically on wild dog control. There is a trial project in the Snowy Plain area.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: That 93 per cent cannot be right.

Dr FLEMING: It is almost a doubling of resources, compared to the previous year. It is not compared to \$521,000, but to \$680,000. Aerial baiting has come up again and again in discussions with the local community as being one of the most important techniques for controlling wild dogs. There are differing views about that, some of which the Committee has heard. The view of the local community cannot be ignored. We conducted aerial baiting until a couple of years ago when it was suspended as a result of a Species Impact Statement that raised serious issues about the non-target species impact that aerial baiting was having. Specifically, it raised concerns about impacts on the tiger quoll. As a result, we adopted a range of alternative baiting techniques, including extensive use of mound baiting.

We now need to focus on research to satisfy the community about whether we can safely undertake aerial baiting. The research program is about addressing that issue front on. We need to understand the distribution and habits of quolls in the environment, where they move to and whether they take baits in a field situation. The initial commitment to that research program is \$140,000 and that money will come from areas of the budget other than the feral animal control program. Our committee also looked at adjusting control techniques and focused on one area to see whether we could come up with a package that works better.

The area we agreed on was the Snowy Plain area. There are a number of elements to this including the employment of an officer by the RLPB, who could move across tenures. An important issue raised by many people was that capacity to move to where the problems exist, and not be captured by being an employee of one organisation or another and being unable to move effectively between tenures. The support of land-holders is a very important part of that because, while the parks service is a very big player in this region, clearly the issue is also relevant to bush areas in State forests, private land and Crown land, as is the capacity to move into the areas where the dogs are causing problems.

It is also important to try to identify target areas, to be very flexible about those target areas and to listen to the right people who will provide us with information, including the local land-holders, and the trappers who work and know these areas. There has been a significant in-fill of the bait station program to try to create a more effective array of baits that are more likely to be taken by dogs. Very importantly I think one of the benefits of the panel is that it drives a spirit of co-operation, and that is going to achieve many more results. There is a lot of work still to do. I am certainly not belittling the size of the problem that still exists but one of the achievements to date is that there is a greater shared understanding of the concerns and a more co-operative approach, I think.

I will not dwell on the Brindabella program because I think there was a submission before lunch which covered this program. We have been very closely involved with it in the Brindabella Valley and some of the results are referred to on the slide being shown. I am happy to come back to that but I think I will move on, given the earlier submission.

One of the new reserve areas is at Holbrook in the Woomargama National Park. This is a reserve that we took over in January last year and we have tried to move quickly with land-holders to establish effective control programs. Again, I think the spirit of co-operation is working well. We have been achieving significant numbers of trapped dogs and there has also been a very active pig program in that area. I do not know that there is any more I need to say about that at the moment. I just thought that I would cover some other pest issues and then conclude the presentation. Afterwards either I, Mr Horsley or Mr Darlington will be happy to answer questions.

Wild horses are a very significant issue in Kosciuszko as well. The estimate of numbers is not precise. There is ongoing work to try to get a better idea of the distribution of horses within Kosciuszko, but population figures put it in excess of 3,000. The horses are having impacts which are unacceptable in the alpine area. In recent years they have moved more and more into that area. There is also a potential hazard to motorists in places like Dead Horse Gap.

We have developed a steering committee which is a working committee. A lot of people in the local community and those who have expertise or a history of working in the mountains are trying to develop a wild horse management plan. There has been a lot of consultation and development of that plan. With that committee, we are hoping to trial different techniques to safely remove horses from the alpine area and relocate them outside the park. It has been a very productive process with different sectors of the community, who have strong views about the way in which we should manage horses, playing a very constructive role and recognising that this approach is probably going to deliver us the best results. In addition to the draft management plan, which we expect will be exhibited this year, there is a PhD student who is doing a research program designed to try to better understand the population, ecology and pattern of horse movements. That will be a very important tool for us in the future management of those horse populations.

Another big area of activity for us concerns foxes. A lot of the dog control programs that were referred to earlier also have significant impacts on foxes. In fact, in relation to the bait program, many more baits will be taken by foxes than will be taken by dogs. That is just the nature of that type of program. That program itself has impacts on the fox population. As mentioned in the Servicewide submission, the Service has a fox threat abatement plan. We are focusing on a number of places in the Southern Directorate. I think that the Committee is travelling to Nowra tomorrow where you will see some of this work first hand in these areas. Something that you will not see tomorrow but which is a very important activity for the Service is the attempt to protect the Kangaroo Valley's brush-tailed rock wallaby species. We are working with the local community in the form of the Friends of the Brush-Tailed Rock Wallaby. Fox control is one of the key issues for the survival of that population.

Through the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board, there is a very active contract for fox control in that area, including within the south-east forests quite a lot of work to protect certain native species. Our report describes briefly the work that is going on in that area particularly with the long-footed potoroo. That is a threatened species which, as part of its recovery program, has fox control as a key component. Pigs are another big issue for us, and one of the areas that the Service is very actively grappling with at the moment. There is a lot of work that is still to be done in this area. The slides I am showing give you an idea of the areas in which we are very active in pig control and the type of success we are having. Again, these programs are often done with RLPBs. I will just give you a chance to read that slide because it gives more examples of where programs are occurring. I will provide the Committee with a copy of this presentation. We also have issues to do with feral goats within the Directorate. The slides show a range of programs that are occurring in different parts of the Southern Directorate.

In summary, feral animals are a very high priority for the Service. They are certainly a very high priority for this Directorate. All of those species are important to us. The most significant element of our budget is to do with wild dogs but there is significant expenditure on other species as well. We have seen a significant increase in that expenditure. I am not sure that there is more that I need to say about that. I think the best thing to do is answer any questions the Committee may have.

CHAIR: Can you give us a bit more advice on whether quolls actually do take 1080 or not? Is there any evidence whatsoever about that?

Dr FLEMING: It is a difficult issue. There is evidence that 1080 will kill quolls. The key issue is whether or not in a field situation the delivery of baits, either aerially or through ground-based baiting, will kill quolls and, even if that kills some individual quolls, whether it will kill a significant number and affect the population of that species. That is what the research is aiming to find out. It is pretty clear that 1080 is toxic to quolls and they will die if it is ingested. There is some evidence, but it is not conclusive for the part of the world that we are talking about, that quolls will take aerial baits and they will die, and it has the potential to have a significant impact on their population. There is some evidence over in the Tallagandra area that is not conclusive and that is why we want to undertake the research program that has been described.

CHAIR: There appears to be a fairly significant increase in dogs within certain areas, shown by increased attacks on sheep. Can you tell the Committee how fast that can be placed under control and what is the best method for doing that, if not by aerial baiting?

Dr FLEMING: In the absence of aerial baiting—and I am quite happy to talk at length about whether or not aerial baiting is the way to go and what we may or may not be able to do with it—the techniques that we use are those basically that are available to us, namely, mound baiting, trapping and shooting. The important thing is that you have to combine those techniques. None works in isolation. Fencing is part of it in special areas. It has been suggested that maybe one solution is fencing of the whole of the reserve estate. I think that costs will beat that—not

just the costs of erecting those fences but the very large costs of maintaining them so that they actually continue to provide effective barriers. Apart from that, the geography will be a problem. In some areas, it will simply be impossible to fence. But fencing is certainly one part in some areas in a range of strategies.

What we are doing is the right approach and that is to make sure that there are co-operative programs, that we listen to the right people about where the problems are occurring, and that we have fairly intensive baiting programs. Mound baiting is used at the moment because that is the technique which is regarded as being both the safest for quolls—and they are the major species of concern—and the baits are also still received by dogs. Trapping is also a critical component of that, and one will not succeed without the other. I do not think that there is any simple, magic solution which will overcome dogs attacking sheep. One of the discussions we had with the advisory panel concerned what is an acceptable level of sheep losses to dogs. That is a difficult question, but the level is certainly well below the levels which have been occurring in recent years. Those levels fluctuate a bit over time, but the levels in recent years certainly have been high.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Dr Fleming, in your opening remarks you produced statistics on the screen. Can you tell us over what period those statistics were reflective?

Dr FLEMING: I am sorry, I meant to mention that at the beginning. They are basically between six and 18 months. I can provide you with more detail if that is necessary, but the range of the period is six to 18 months.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Yes, please. It will be helpful if we can try to deal with common statistics or at least know the period over which they have been achieved. You said there are differing views regarding aerial baiting which was shown by the evidence we received this morning. I wanted to interrupt and ask whose were the differing views, because the opinions given were pretty conclusive about the popularity of aerial baiting.

Dr FLEMING: I was not here then, but my understanding was that the first submission this morning from the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board raised a lot of questions about the effectiveness of aerial baiting compared with other control techniques and that that view differed significantly from those of some of the other people who presented submissions to the Committee.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Your mound baiting and non-aerial baiting programs, will these take place in wilderness areas?

Dr FLEMING: They are taking place in wilderness areas at the moment. For example, the Byadbo program, which I think is the largest baiting program occurring anywhere in the State at present, goes up to 25 kilometres into Byadbo, which is a declared wilderness area. So the fact that it is a wilderness area has no effect on the control strategies that were put in place.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Given the size of the problem that has been suggested in evidence this morning, the degree of the problem and the history that has been brought forward which has brought about the current problem, would you like to give the Committee your opinion on the history of the region which has built up to the problem that we are looking at right now?

Dr FLEMING: I might refer the question as well to my colleague the Regional Manager of the Snowy Mountains region, Dave Darlington. I have been in the job for three years. I do not have a lot of personal history back into that period. There seems to be a lot of speculation and relatively little hard evidence about where a lot of the dogs came from and the numbers of kills over the years. I have seen records from the Rural Land Protection Boards but a number of people tell me that those records would be an underestimate of sheep take because a lot of people do not bother reporting, so I do not know how reliable a lot of those records are. What I have seen suggests fluctuation over a long period.

Mr DARLINGTON: Honestly, I wish I knew the full answer to that. Kosciusko National Park is a huge area and I think the response has got to be a section-by-section basis. We have had discussions with our colleagues from Rural Land Protection Boards, park neighbours and park staff on the issue of just the Byadbo area which is that south-eastern part of the park. We do know, going back about four years ago, that there was a fairly major summer drought and a winter drought to the point that dogs seemed to do very well out of that. Their main diet is the wallabies, kangaroos and wombats which do very poorly because there was not much grass remaining in that particular area. Tucker was on a plate to them, if you like, in that it was pretty easy to get. Obviously, had that drought gone on for a lot longer period, it might have been a different scenario.

Perhaps in that particular area that is one reason why we suddenly saw a great increase in dog numbers. We do know that in that area, from the observations that our dog trappers have made—just in terms of the number of signs of dogs such as scratchings, scats and so forth—we are seeing fewer signs such as fewer scratchings, but we still have significant stock losses. It is a very, very complex job. If I look at other areas of the park, they were not affected to anywhere near the same extent by the drought. It is harder to make a linkage between the drought of about four years ago and the numbers of dogs we now see. So it seems to be a complex problem. I understand that there has been a fair amount of talk lately of dog numbers increasing in a wide range of areas throughout Australia, not just necessarily in this area.

Dr FLEMING: This is not a major part of the equation, but I just want to note it. One of the frustrating small elements of this is the pig dog hunting that is occurring in national park areas. For a start it is illegal. There is evidence that pig doggers actually release pigs into the park to maintain populations for hunting in the future. There is evidence that some of their dogs are escaping. It is not a big part of the picture; it is an issue that I just want to record. Anything that we can do to try to help control it will just be a small addition to resolve the issue.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: You mentioned a combined approach of baiting, trapping and shooting. What is your attitude towards registered volunteer shooters, under the control of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, being used, especially for pig control?

Dr FLEMING: My comments were in relation to dog control.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Yes, I know.

Dr FLEMING: Do you want me to respond in relation to dog control as well?

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Yes, but primarily in relation to pig control.

Dr FLEMING: I do not think it would be effective in relation to dog control. You are lucky to see dogs there; they are not visible. An issue that has been raised in the media recently is that we could use registered shooters to try to control dog numbers. I just do not believe that it would be effective. Shooting is generally a reactive tool. It is an opportunistic thing which is used. In relation to pigs I have significant problems with the proposal because of the danger to human safety and the capacity to control them. Who would be responsible for any accidents that occur? There are significant issues that we would need to resolve. It would be a Service-wide issue. It may be a question that you also wish to address to the Director-General when he appears before the Committee. But that is certainly a matter that I would have some concern about.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: How many native animals would you estimate that a feral animal would consume over, say, a 12-month period?

Dr FLEMING: I assume that you are talking mostly about dogs?

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Or cats.

Dr FLEMING: I cannot give you figures. I can see what research is available and make that available to the Committee. There is evidence in regard to dogs that they do take wallabies, wombats and animals like that. I do not have figures on the numbers of native animals taken. Wild dogs and, in particular, dingoes, have been a part of the food chain for a long time. So the assumption—which I think is probably a fairly sound assumption—is that the populations of native animals have pretty much reached a balance in those predator-prey relationships involving dingoes. Wild dogs occupy the same sort of role in the food chain. What I cannot tell you about—there may be others who can and I will see what I can find out—is what effect the changing numbers of wild dogs would have on that balance. It is very hard to gauge the exact numbers of wild dogs either within the park estate or in any other area of bushland. It is a major task. We have not allocated the resources within my Directorate to try to find that information.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Evidence was given this morning which indicates that, over a long period, the number of wild animals in the region has declined. If that is attributable to feral animals surely it is reasonable to try to estimate what each feral animal would consume over a given period. You could realise the value of destroying that animal as against conserving the ones that it does not consume.

Dr FLEMING: There are two parts to that question. First, if there is information available to me, I will make sure I pass it on to you. It would be a very expensive project. In a sense, I do not need persuading that feral animals need control. What you are trying to do is point out an argument in support of feral animal control. I am already over the line on the need for that.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: I am not trying to persuade you; I am just trying to obtain information on behalf of the citizens of New South Wales so that we have a relative picture of the importance of the work of this Committee.

Dr FLEMING: I will get what information is available to me and pass it to the Committee. I do not have it to hand at the moment.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Is the contract that exists between the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board available to this Committee?

Dr FLEMING: I do not see why not. I would want to consult with the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board to make sure that they have no problems with it.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Dr FLEMING, could you provide us with details about how much each of those RLPBs are paid?

Dr FLEMING: I cannot. I do not have it in front of me now. I can provide to the Committee the size and the dollar value of those contracts.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: You indicated earlier that there was evidence from the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board that aerial baiting does not work, which is correct. Today we received evidence from several other RLPBs that indicated that aerial baiting does work. Of those RLPBs that gave evidence, the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board is the only one that is on a financial contract with you.

Dr FLEMING: That is not correct. We also engage the Cooma RLPB and the Yass RLPB. We have contracts with a number of Rural Land Protection Boards, including those who may have argued today. I was not present for their presentations.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: To do the same full eradication work?

Dr FLEMING: To do wild dog control work, yes. That includes the Bombala RLPB.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: They were not in the list of RLPBs that you put on the board. Braidwood was, but the others were not.

Dr FLEMING: The lists that I have provided are illustrative. They are not complete. I thought that they were referred to there. In any event, we have contracts with a number of other RLPBs. I have had and will continue to have discussions with those boards and with land-holders about the merits of aerial baiting. We are running the research program to try to find out whether we can reconcile the value of aerial baiting with the protection of native species.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Conflicting evidence was also given to our Committee today on the loss of stock in the South Coast Rural Lands Protection Board area. Rural lands protection boards indicated that no stock had been lost in the area, yet other people who gave evidence to us under oath indicated that large amounts of stock had been lost in the area. During lunch New South Wales Farmers representatives who were not able to give evidence to the Committee indicated that that was also the case. Does it concern you that an RLPB that you are paying to control the feral animals in the area seems to be at odds with the farmers that they are meant to be protecting?

Dr FLEMING: I would want to know that the RLPB information that they provide to us is as accurate as it can be. I do not know the reason for the dispute in numbers. All I can do is urge people, if there are stock losses, to use the channels that are available to them to report those stock losses. It has been raised with me on a number of occasions that farmers sometimes give up and think there is no point, or that it is a waste of time to report numbers. That does not help anyone. All I can do is encourage anyone who is suffering significant stock losses, or

any stock losses, to make sure that they are reported to the RLPBs as they are required to report on those stock losses.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Do the contracts that you have with the RLPBs have a performance quota in them?

Dr FLEMING: What do you mean?

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Are the RLPBs required to reduce the number of stock that are hurt, or do a certain number of dogs have to be shot?

Dr FLEMING: We do not have quotas in them but we review the performance before we renew each contract relating to their delivery of agreed baiting programs. But we do not have quotas for the number of stock losses or the number of dogs to be taken.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Is a specified amount of money spent on the actual baiting and trapping of dogs?

Dr FLEMING: I would need to review the contract. I can do that. Assuming that we can provide the contract to you, you can see that for yourself.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I would like to ask you about aerial baiting. In some of the submissions that we heard this morning questions were raised about whether there was a greater danger to native fauna from aerial baiting, or whether there was a greater danger because of the increased population of predators that has developed since aerial baiting was stopped. Have you any comments, or do any of your colleagues have any comments on that?

Dr FLEMING: I can certainly comment in relation to that. Just going back one step so that the background is there, a Species Impact Statement was undertaken for aerial baiting in a number of places throughout New South Wales. In some cases it concluded that aerial baiting could be safely undertaken. In other cases, including the Kosciusko area, it concluded that the risks were too high based on current knowledge. Kosciusko, as I said, was one of those regions. The focus of the concern of Dr McIlroy, who did the Species Impact Statement, was the native quoll. Evidence suggests that many other native species that may take baits have a much higher tolerance. So it is important to understand that the issue we are focusing on is really about the protection of the native quoll.

I refer to the issue of whether or not aerial baiting poses a greater risk than not aerial baiting and therefore there is an increase in the dog population, which can then predate on the quoll. There are a couple of elements to that. First, it assumes that the dog population is increasing as a result of stopping aerial baiting. A lot of people believe that to be true. There is not a lot of hard evidence. It is hard to get hard evidence in relation to that because of the nature of the question. Of course, other control programs have taken its place. So you have got to ask the question: How great is the increase in dog numbers as a result of stopping aerial baiting? There is also then the issue of whether or not those dogs are predated on the tiger quoll, which is the species in question.

The information that we have—and it is far from comprehensive—indicates that dogs do not often, if ever, take quolls. Their diet includes animals like wallabies, wombats and rabbits but there is not a lot of evidence of quolls being recorded in their scats. So I am not sure that that is a problem. There may be an issue—again there is not evidence for it—about competing for the same resources, as they are both predators. But the question really is: If quolls have evolved with the presence of dingoes occupying the same role in the food chain, is it likely that the presence of dogs would provide that competition for resources and affect their numbers? That is much less certain. So I do not think there is a lot of evidence available to us which suggests that an increase in dog numbers, because of the cessation of aerial baiting is, by itself, having an impact on the quoll population. I could not sustain that, but we want to find out more about that population. That is the point of the research that we are undertaking now.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Are there any pure dingoes left in the Kosciusko area? Do you know the effect on them of aerial baiting or the use of 1080?

Dr FLEMING: A research project is under way which has been sponsored by a number of agencies. That involves the RLPBs, NPWS, State Forests, and the Australian Capital Territory Government looking at the movement of wild dogs in north Kosciusko and surrounding areas. It is also doing genetic analysis. Preliminary results indicate that 20 per cent of dogs that have been sampled are pure bred. There is a significant percentage

beyond that which has a low proportion of dog genes, and a significant number that has a higher proportion of dog genes. If that evidence is correct, there appears to be a pure dingo population within northern Kosciusko; the research does not extend to the south. Certainly baiting is killing pure bred dingoes. Evidence suggests that some sheep have been taken by dingoes.

There is a wide variety of forms of dogs which are taken in traps. The downside to poisoning is that you do not see the dogs being killed. We really only record those that are trapped, but there is a diversity in those stocks. Clearly there is evidence of interbreeding in some cases. It is almost certain that pure bred dingoes are killed by the baiting programs that we have in place and others outside the park. I could not tell you the impact that is having on the overall population of the species.

CHAIR: There is evidence to show that dingoes keep down the population of foxes and cats, is there not?

Dr FLEMING: I am not equipped to talk about that, but I can refer your question to someone who can.

CHAIR: The NRA is looking at delisting 1080, which has been banned in America. Recently California voted to confirm that ban. What would happen if 1080 was banned?

Dr FLEMING: I do not want to predict the outcome of the NRA investigation. I remain confident that we can demonstrate the responsible use of 1080 and that they will recognise that it is an extremely effective poison in the control of some important feral animals. If it was banned, we will start to struggle to find an effective alternative. It is one of the ironies that faces other land managers, that sometimes we have to kill animals. It is no easier to kill feral animals. The reality is we have to do it, and 1080 is very effective. It seems to be relatively target-specific compared with a number of our native species. Quolls are an obvious exception. We try to devise techniques to overcome that.

Banning 1080 would have a significant impact on the feral animal control programs. The Service would argue quite strongly to the NRA that we can use 1080 effectively and responsibly, because it is an important control tool. The downsides of not using it would be significantly greater than any downside associated with its use. I have contacted the NRA to make them aware of our research project in Kosciusko, because it goes to one of their key issues which is the impact of 1080 on non-target species. I will be sure that the NRA is aware of our research and our findings. I am quite hopeful that we can satisfy them that various baiting strategies are quite target specific.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Was your Species Impact Statement which led to the cessation of aerial baiting aimed at the quoll? Or was the pure bred dingo also considered as a threatened species, or a species at risk of that process?

Dr FLEMING: The statement looked at the impact of baiting programs on a number of listed threatened species. The dingo is not a listed threatened species. The quoll was of particular concern, as well as others which we looked at. The Species Impact Statement is available for the Committee to peruse.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So the dingo was not considered?

Dr FLEMING: I was not involved in the detail of that.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Does the NPWS have a written policy on larger grazing animals in national parks—specifically horses, goats, cattle and sheep—as distinct from the management of predator animals such as dogs, cats, foxes, et cetera?

Dr FLEMING: The Service has a policy which prohibits grazing of domestic stock in national parks. Goats and others are treated as feral animals. Were you referring to agricultural activity?

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Essentially to the potential impact of large grazing animals, whether domestic livestock or feral horses. Could you provide a copy of your policy?

Dr FLEMING: Yes, I can provide all relevant policies.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Many submissions mentioned the huge fuel loads of grey and rank plant material in national parks since the removal of grazing, which harbour pigs and dogs. Do you accept that the

removal of large grazing animals from national parks has changed the ecosystem? Are there now much larger fuel loads, or grey and rank material in the national parks estate?

Dr FLEMING: I am not familiar with the term grey and rank. Certainly the removal of grazing has changed the understorey in those areas and allowed the return of a number of native species which were suppressed during grazing. There is a significantly greater shrub population in a number of areas and there would be a change in the mix of grass and forb species in forest areas where grazing occurred. That change would have occurred as a result of ceasing grazing at places such as Kosciusko.

Mr DARLINGTON: Kosciusko is a huge area in terms of its vastness and altitude. The interaction between grazing and fuel loads is complex and has been debated over years. It has been well documented. We could provide some of that information to the Committee.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you accept that there has been a decline in the health of the ecosystem since the removal of large grazing animals? The feed that is available for native animals, such as macropods, is of lesser quality now than it is on adjoining lands where grazing occurs? Many submissions pointed to the fact that native animals are moving out of the park and onto grazing lands because of the quality of feed in the park.

Mr DARLINGTON: Macropods respond much better to a green pick. Other animals are probably better handled now with less grazing. It is no great surprise that farmers have macropods on their pasture land that has good water. I could take you to areas of the Kosciusko National Park where a lot of baiting is done and we have high levels of macropods. Driving along a road you have to be very careful. However in other areas macropod numbers appear to be low and other animals do extremely well. Macropods thrive in a modified environment. Grazing could be of some benefit, but broadly the lack of grazing is like a lack of introduced animals, and would benefit by that.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Before European settlement there would have been a regular burning regime in the mountains, as there was in most of Australia at the hands of Aboriginal people. That has ceased so in the traditional sense there was either regular burning or heavy grazing by macropods and other animals in the park area. Since the cessation of domestic livestock grazing and burning would it be fair to say that the condition of the national park is now substantially different from its natural state and does not really reflect its original state.

Mr DARLINGTON: Our vegetation will respond to a whole range of things. It is not clear what the Aborigines burnt, and when. On the Kosciusko altitude range there is a lot of country above 1,600 metres. Rarely will you see macropods there. Hazard reduction burning has been raised today. It is important to note that the plans we implement are developed and endorsed through shire-based strict bushfire management committees. It is a team approach to the development and implementation of the plans. We have a fire management plan for the Kosciusko National Park which is endorsed by the relevant committees.

Dr FLEMING: Earlier the point was made that perhaps NPWS officers were historically releasing dogs into the park.

CHAIR: That was anecdotal.

Dr FLEMING: I heard that said once before and checked it out. I have no knowledge or recollection of that happening. As far as I am aware, and from checking by our staff who have been in the Service for a long time, there is no record of that happening.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Or evidence?

Dr FLEMING: No evidence of it happening officially or unofficially, as far as I am aware.

CHAIR: What would you do if it did happen?

Dr FLEMING: That would be a very serious disciplinary matter. One of the frustrations with pig doggers is that they bring dogs into the park and release them. We take them to court and seek the maximum penalty. I would treat it as a very serious disciplinary matter if a Service employee did that.

(The witnesses withdrew)

DIERK von BEHRENS, Public Servant, 121 Springvale Drive, Weetangera, and

IAN HAYNES, Retiree, 21 Roberts Street, Macquarie, affirmed and examined.

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr von BEHRENS: For and on behalf of the National Parks Association of New South Wales, and I am also making some comments on behalf of the co-owners of Black Ridge, a property under a conservation agreement north of here.

Mr HAYNES: On behalf of the National Parks Association of New South Wales.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the term of reference of this inquiry?

Mr von BEHRENS: Yes.

Mr HAYNES: Yes.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that, in the public interest, certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee will be willing to accede to your request but this may be overturned by a vote of the Legislative Council. Do wish to make a statement?

Mr von BEHRENS: I thank the Committee for the opportunity of addressing the inquiry. First, my background is that I have studied agricultural science among other studies and I have walked in the area or the region since the 1960s. I am one of the co-owners of the Black Ridge which I mentioned before. It is a 1,922-hectare property—probably one of the largest with a conservation agreement over it—just north of here, between here and Bredbo. We both have intensive outdoor experience, particularly in and around the Kosciuszko National Park but including a full range of land tenures, State forests, nature reserves, travelling stock reserves, unoccupied Crown land, leaseholds and freeholds. Both of our interests range over natural and cultural history, photography, conservation and bushwalking. We recently walked the whole of the Australian alps National Walking Track—which is a bit of a misnomer because it is actually more of a concept—a distance of 730 kilometres from Canberra to Valhalla.

It is this background and experience which led us to express our concerns on the impact of ferals which I will list particularly: pigs, horses, foxes, rabbits, dogs, goats, cats, deer, bees, even mice, wild cattle and sheep. We want today to use our experience which has been gained from the mountain tops to the gorges and plains to, first, highlight the current damage by feral animals, particularly to native flora and fauna, and second, to emphasise, including by making interstate comparisons, the inadequacies, and third, to make a number of recommendations, including that greater resources should be applied to the control of feral animals and that a more rational crossjurisdictional and uniform set of legislative procedures be set up for the control of pest species.

Now to the range of damage that we have come across in our experience: there has been an enormous amount of destruction of flora, particularly in the high country or the alpine country, by horses. We make comparisons of what happened years ago and what is happening now. The area has recovered to a large extent—in some areas anyway where there are no horses—and the recovery is dramatic. Problems have occurred such as erosion, the carving of tracks, physical soil disturbance, resulting introduction of exotics, severe streambank degradation, watercourse pollution, destruction of seedlings and regrowth, ringbarking of mature trees, biological pollution of drinking water, the threat of diseases and actual cases of diseases resulting from animal faeces, including giardia and cryptosporidium. These may be very good for some bushwalkers because they give you the runs, but that is not really what you want when bushwalking, although it may be good for cricketers.

Feral animals also compete strongly for food and resting and reproduction sites, including warrens, with native animals. They are current spreaders of diseases. They are potential vectors for diseases that we do not yet have in Australia, some of which have already been mentioned, but which are damaging economically, environmentally and, in the case of rabies, to human health. Foot-and-mouth disease could be spread readily by pigs, goats and deer. Before going on, I think it is appropriate for Ian Haynes to talk about our experiences—comparative and otherwise—for a while.

Mr HAYNES: As we have walked along through Kosciusko in the last three months—the Kosciusko National Park in particular—I particularly observed an enormous amount of pig damage running right from the ACT border through to the centre of the Kosciusko National Park. In fact, during a snowstorm, we actually followed a pig all the way to the middle part of the park. It was trotting along in front of us. It was too far ahead for us to see, but the fresh tracks were in the snow. Pigs like tracks just like we do and they travel enormous distances, especially once they are disturbed by pig doggers or whatever the case may be. The other thing that we found, or that I noticed, particularly since I have been walking in Kosciusko and fishing since the early 1960s, is the enormous explosion in pigs, dogs and horses, especially in the northern end of the park. As we were walking through this time, we encountered groups of up to 30 horses at a time. Of one particular group, 10 of those—or at least 10—were foals of this year's drop. That is not a bad reproduction rate for one season.

As we walked through the park we found evidence of pigs right up onto the main range and down in the southern part. We also found that the horses have an interesting tactic which is very threatening for some bushwalkers. The horses actually have a tactic of threatening bushwalkers. They come running down the hill and then stop. They go back up the hill and this is repeated. They actually come right down to the tent during the night and starts stomping. You half expect to find a hoof coming through your tent. You are just not quite sure what is coming next. We found this right through the southern end of the park but once we got into Victoria at Cowombat Flat, horses know no boundaries. There are exclusion zones which the Victorian parks service has put into place where you can actually see the amount of grazing taking place outside the exclusion zone by both the horses and the native animals. Inside there is an enormous amount of growth, except at the point where one of the horses decided that inside the paddock, the grass was greener so he jumped in. The fence was not broken but there were horse droppings all round the paddock. Obviously they had a good feed and took off again.

We found down there that in terms of safety of the environment for ourselves, we could not put the tent up unless we took all horse droppings out of the way. Nowhere in that particular spot could we place a tent without it being on a pile of droppings. Given the history of giardia which apparently exists in the upper Murray in that area, we were really cautious about where we were going to drink, if we drank there at all. So there is a threat to the health of bushwalkers in any case or to anybody who is using the water. As we moved through Victoria, we found quite a large number of horses of a slightly smaller stature. We also found over time that horses, like pigs, have been released into the park as a breeding ground. As you said, in Victoria if they are culling horses and there is a pregnant mare, the mare gets left behind until next season. It is a great way to extend your back yard.

In Tooma we found at the southern end of the park that we encountered deer at various places. I find that when I am walking solo, as I do most of the time, you come across a great number of animals. The deer just passed us and we had some problems coming up Barry Way towards Ingebyra south of Jindabyne. It appears as if there has been deer released in that area south of Jindabyne. The numbers are such that we almost had several collisions of deer that were just walking along the roadside along with the cattle. As you are walking up the road, you can actually see the deer droppings and the cow droppings along the roadside. Whether the cows return to their home pastures or not, I would not be too sure.

They are just some of the small things we saw just in this area. As we got through into Victoria, the other problem we encountered was the incursion of the illegal horse riding groups. The attitude apparently is that "There is a riding trail we are supposed to use, but that takes us where 'they' want us to go, not where we want to go." Other comments are, "That is now a wilderness area. It has been locked up. We are not supposed to go there. The bush is a bit thick, but that does not stop us." In many cases there is quite a complete disregard for the rules governing the admission into national parks, for whatever reason.

Mr von BEHRENS: We are extending the concept of feral animals to make some comment on the feral humans as a subspecies of animal.

Mr HAYNES: That aside, I can only applaud the New South Wales Government's creation of additional parks and wilderness areas, but the problem I have is that, in doing this, it appears to me that there is an insufficient allocation of proportional funds to manage all these areas. What is the point of creating these parks and wilderness areas if they cannot be managed properly, if funds and resources are not going to be allocated to do the same job? You cannot expect to spread the existing staff over twice the size of the area.

Mr von BEHRENS: And there are three specific instances I want to carry on with. One concerns goats. The same problem of the release of deer to neighbours and into conservation areas applies to goats. I have circulated some examples of goats that were recently released by a neighbour into Black Ridge. They got rid of a lot of the goats and now they have got some other goats. Now we have the problem of controlling a mob of about 30

goats in an area of almost 2,000 hectares.

How do we deal with that? The other thing is the problem of bees, which is referred to in our submission. Our neighbours are constantly putting bees close to our boundary, usually at the time of the flowering of bugloss, or salvation jane. These are two related species in the echium plantaginium group. We are spending a lot of money, some of it coming with government support, to try to control these weeds. Yet the impact of bees right next to us is going to cause an increasing seed set. The third problem I want to mention is that of neighbouring people using national parks and nature reserves as extensions of their own grazing paddocks.

In Badja Nature Reserve only two or three weeks ago we discovered that a large flock of cattle had been there for a long time. Some of their droppings must be over a year old. So it is repeated use of these areas for grazing. Comments have been made about rank growth and so on. The farmers are using their own solutions in some cases. Animals are being released. There are problems with horses—an issue that we have already touched on. You have seen some of the evidence of that in the photographs that we have given to the Committee. I would like to refer to a few of the things that were said earlier and I would like to counter those statements. We oppose aerial baiting and ground surface baiting using 1080 as being very indiscriminate.

One of the questions that was asked was: How wide do the tiger quolls range? It is my understanding from the work that is being done by Debbie Andrew that female tiger quolls range over an area of six kilometres and males range over an area of 30 kilometres. They are very sensitive to 1080 poison. There is a letter in today's *Cooma Express* which talks about aerial baiting. In Western Australia, because of the high 1080 content of the vegetation, a lot of the native animals are far more resistant to 1080 poison. Therefore, you cannot compare what happens there with what happens here. Even the three milligram baits are considered to be too high for tiger quolls. That work has been initiated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. I would strongly support further research being done on that.

The standard bait—and sometimes there are two baits in the one trap—will certainly knock off any tiger quoll. Those are some of the things that came up. I support the point made earlier on tighter restrictions not only on deer farming but also on goat farming. A point was made earlier about the illegal use of pig hunting and so forth. Why can the same principles not be applied as apply in the case of illegal fishing, that is, the confiscation of gear until such time as the matter goes to court? That will at least inconvenience them. There should be a confiscation of those things that are directly related to an illegal activity, whatever it might be. We support the need for more accurate data and greater research. The reintroduction of grazing animals has already occurred.

The register of volunteer shooters was referred to. In South Australia it has been successful in the elimination of goats in the Flinders ranges. So it may be worthwhile looking further into that. They were flown to the top of the mountain and they combed all areas down the mountain. That is a different environment and comparisons cannot easily be made, but at least it is something worth looking at. Mandatory reporting of stock losses is something else that you might consider. Another issue is the decline in the health of the ecosystem. Then we have a few recommendations of which we will give you copies. There should be integrated pest species control regimes based on specific action plans covering natural geographic areas such as whole catchments of bio-regions. We have seen some examples of good integrated management, but today it is on a too narrow basis.

Much work needs to be done in the development of better biological and biochemical sterilisation agents. There should be adequate enforceable deterrents against the release of animals into the wild. The removal and destruction of animals released or escaping from custody should be clearly the responsibility of the owner. All costs should be borne by the owner and the owner should also be subject to prosecution. Shooting is still one of the most cost-effective and humane methods for the eradication and control of large feral animals, including horses, as long as sufficient calibre rifles and qualified shooters are used. The Committee should recommend against the Minister's ban on shooting—if it has the guts.

No aerial or surface use of poison 1080 should be permitted. The poison 1080 should only be targeted at foxes and dogs and, if used, should only be placed in special bait stations under more than 10 centimetres of soil. Such stations should be spaced no closer than some kilometres apart and a certain number of metres from cover. The details need to be worked out in that research program. Until adequate research is carried out no more than one bait per bait station should be used. The quantity of 1080 baits should be less than three milligrams. Animals killed by poison should be collected and taken out of the surface food chain by being buried at least 50 centimetres below the ground.

All baiting programs, whether to protect stock or wildlife, should only be a component of a larger long-term ongoing action plan which includes the use of other appropriate management techniques. Specific areas to protect threatened, endangered and vulnerable species should be fenced off and total eradication of the most important feral animals within those enclosures should be achieved, mobilising the help of volunteers to achieve those ends, where possible. There is a need for experimentation to determine which type of fence is most useful in any particular terrain. Greater resources should be applied to control feral animals and more rational cross-jurisdictional and uniform sets of legislative procedures should be formulated for the control of pest species.

CHAIR: You said earlier that had been walking through these areas for 20 or 30 years?

Mr von BEHRENS: Yes.

CHAIR: Have you noticed a change in the kind of feral animals in the areas in which you have been walking?

Mr HAYNES: There has been a dramatic increase since the early 1960s to mid-1960s.

CHAIR: Of what?

Mr HAYNES: Pigs, horses and dogs.

CHAIR: Could you quantify that?

Mr HAYNES: It is very hard to quantify that. When I first started fishing and walking around the Tantangara area I would see one or two pigs. I would very rarely see a horse. On occasions I would see a dingo.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What was the country like in those days? How did you feel about it?

Mr HAYNES: It was very similar to what it is now. Some plant species have actually come back. Because of the fire regimes and the grazing regimes, which have existed for hundreds of years, there has been a change in the plant and the tree mix. I have also noticed during my time of walking that not the same amount of snow is coming down lower. When I lived in Cooma the winters were much colder. As a child I would go out and find that the taps had broken from ice and frost. Sure, we still get the same cold weather, but we do not get that intense cold any more. So there is a change in the climate as well as the grazing regime for both feral and other native animals in the park.

In recent years there has been a vast increase in the horse population. I saw very little pig damage in the early days. Nowadays you can hardly walk anywhere in the frost-covered parts of the countryside where there are no trees below the hill or below the tree line. It is very awkward to walk over. You are getting all the exotic species invading the disturbed soil. It also takes a long time for the natives to try to re-establish themselves in that disturbed soil. I have photographs of horses which you might like to see. Those photographs show what happens where you have exclusion zones. There are classic zones in the Victorian high plains. In these inclusion zones in the high plains there has been a change in the plant mix over the last 60 odd years. The photographs of Cowombat show what has happened inside the fence line and what is happening outside, which is quite dramatic. Where there are great numbers of horses moving in the Kosciusko area there is a large area of dieback in eucalypt trees. That was not there when I first started walking. That has happened in recent years.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: After the national park was started?

Mr HAYNES: No, the national park was there then. This is in the northern end which runs from the Australian Capital Territory border and heads south into the park. Going right through the middle of that is a horse track which used to be called a drive track. That has been closed as they are revegetating. The horses are spreading disease. Their hooves, like our boots and the tyres of our vehicles, spread disease and seeds throughout the park area. Victoria is a classic example. Blackberries and English broom are just taking over. It is frightening to see what is happening down there. You can see it predominantly all along the vehicle tracks and motorcycle tracks in the forest areas. Along the edge of the tracks you can see these invading species taking over and spreading down the mountainside. We have not got those problems here yet.

In my time walking through those areas I have noticed a change in the plant mix, especially up in the snow country where it has become very thick. Over time a lot of these environments will change again if they are not

interfered with. In some of those areas are some historic relics. Where controlled burning or hazard reduction burning takes place any timber buildings disappear and all that is left is a couple of stones. I have an interest in local history, so I am observant of everything on the ground. I observe the effect of feral horses, pigs and dogs and I am also aware of our cultural heritage. My concern about fires is the risk that we run of losing some of our heritage at the same time. I have noticed a vast increase in feral animals in Kosciusko in the last 20 years.

CHAIR: What about native species, marsupials and so on?

Mr HAYNES: A lot of those are hard to see because many are nocturnal. The tiger quoll is very difficult to see. Referring to native plants in Kosciusko, the alpine buttercup was thought to be extinct at the time of grazing. Since grazing and burning stopped the plant disappeared in Victoria and it has never recovered. However, in Kosciusko in the summertime there is a fantastic display of this once endangered species. Other plants have come back in the same manner. Alpine celery is another plant that has returned. It is noticeable now in Victoria where they have excluded grazing. Alpine celery is really making a comeback around Mount Howitt. When you remove the large herbivores out of the parks it is amazing just how the plants start to recover.

But in the snow gum country my concern about controlled burning is evident in Victoria. As a fire moves through the bush, any old growth trees that are hollow are slowly being burned out. So the nesting sites for both birds and mammals are disappearing. We are getting new growth forests and there are no trees for nesting. The alpine ash forests of Victoria have almost been wiped out. People are now going into these places and they are putting in nesting boxes for the leadbeaters possum. They are putting wooden boxes up in the trees. We will have to wait for 80 or 100 years before those sorts of nesting holes start to develop. As you walk through the Kosciusko area you see a number of areas where fire has not caused a great amount of damage. But in other areas there are totally new forests. The regeneration is quite impressive for a number of reasons.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Are you representing the National Parks Association today, or are you presenting your own views?

Mr von BEHRENS: We are representing the National Parks Association of New South Wales. Mice were not mentioned earlier, but I am supplementing that a little.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Is it the ideological position of the National Parks Association that the Kosciusko region should be cleared of farms and livestock?

Mr HAYNES: The Kosciusko National Park, yes.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: The region?

Mr von BEHRENS: I will take advice on that and come back to you.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: In your opening remarks, and it may have been a slip of the tongue, you listed feral animals and said "wild cattle and sheep". Did you mean wild cattle and wild sheep?

Mr von BEHRENS: Yes.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: You have heard of problems faced by farmers in the region. What is the National Parks Association contributing towards the solution of those problems?

Mr von BEHRENS: The National Parks Association is widely represented on a number of advisory committees. Our submission to this inquiry, which has clear terms of reference about the protection of native species, is only one contribution. We are not opposed to the control of canids in the border area where there will be damage to the adjoining farmers. The methods used for control have to be humane, effective and target-specific and not broadscale scattering of baits. We have anecdotal and observational evidence that the number of wedge-tailed eagles in the Yaouk Valley has declined significantly in recent years.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Lots of farmers who are in this room have real problems with feral animals. Can you make a contribution towards that solution?

Mr von BEHRENS: Let me go through my recommendations again. There needs to be increased resources for feral animal control. There needs to be more research. There needs to be rational cross-jurisdictional

and uniform legislative procedures, rather than fragmentation and everyone doing their own thing. They should not be an emotional anecdotal set of stories saying that a hell of a lot has happened. For example, recently a friend bought a farm near Nimmitabel and seven of his sheep were killed. The owner of the farm then became the manager. His wife and their grandchild were almost attacked by dogs, because they got between the kill and the dogs. The two of them took out the dogs that turned out to be full-bred dogs from Canberra, with markings in their ears. They took out the dogs at a distance of 250 metres, by shooting them. There are cases in which the NPWS is being accused of letting animals go into neighbouring land, when the farmer found that his own dogs were doing the damage.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: A number of comments have been made about the amount of snow on the ground. Twice as much snow fell in the Snowy Mountains in the 1990s as fell in the 1980s.

Mr von BEHRENS: You are comparing two decades that are close together. Statistically that may be the case, but we are talking about the long-term trends in climate change. We can show examples of where the frost hollow circumference has changed. Trees have been affected by global warming.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Mr Haynes, I am familiar with Victoria. I contend that the blackberry proliferation is overwhelmingly along watercourses.

Mr HAYNES: Have you walked the alpine track?

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Parts of it, yes.

Mr HAYNES: If your statement were true, I suggest you walk more of the alpine track, especially between Mount Wills and Mount Bogong.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: In the valleys the proliferation of blackberries clearly follows the watercourses.

Mr HAYNES: Of course, where else can they go? It does the same in Kosciusko, in the Geehi River.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: That is not what you said earlier.

Mr HAYNES: I said it comes down the mountain, and I stick to that.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Furthermore, you commented that hazard reduction reduced the bird habitat. I suggest that without hazard reduction where you get the types of holocaust conditions which result from the lack of hazard reduction, you end up with terrible devastation of wildlife. That happened recently and in 1994. That is far worse than the damage, and there is damage, through hazard reduction.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: And as happened at Byadbo.

Mr HAYNES: If you are going to have a holocaust you will lose most things.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Everything.

Mr HAYNES: But if you continually burn off parts of the countryside, for whatever reason, you are slowly destroying the old-growth habitat; any hollow tree will disappear. Walking through forests south of Kowombat, you can see successive hazard reduction burns taking out old trees.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: That area is in Victoria and has been heavily impacted upon by logging. That is not a fair comparison.

Mr HAYNES: I am not talking about the logged areas.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Most of the area is heavily logged.

Mr HAYNES: Not where we were walking, south of Kowombat.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Along Misery Trail it is heavily logged.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: You were here when comments were made about the regrowth of native grasses in the park where grazing is prohibited. It was said that native grasses are unpalatable and unattractive to animals. It was suggested that they were rank. Could you comment on the regrowth since grazing of cattle and sheep was banned?

Mr HAYNES: Certainly. The grasses are much thicker. I have no doubt that if you put sheep in there they would not eat it, because it would probably be sour, unless it is burnt. To make green pick you need to burn it. There is a nice thick snow grass in many parts of the park. It was said earlier that water is not coming down to the dam. The water is not coming down in great rushes but if you have no grass you will have enormous amounts of water travelling across the surface of bare ground. With that sort of grass and tree cover the water will percolate down to the streams at a much slower rate.

Mr von BEHRENS: In parts of the park in the alpine are, many of the old sheep tracks are such that they go half way up my thigh, from the erosion that happened when sheep were in that area. Most of it has recovered but there are still areas that after more than 50 years of grazing are improving. There is needle ice that comes to the surface as a result of past grazing. Originally the ground cover had very few macropods; at times the largest animal was probably an echidna and other small animals. The impact that horses are now making is shown in the photograph album that we will show during a break.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: You are the only people who mentioned feral bees pollinating noxious weeds inside the park. What do you recommend be done about that?

Mr von BEHRENS: The National Parks Association has asked that there be an exclusion zone from the surrounding nature reserves in core national park areas of six kilometres, for the stationing of apiarist bees, which is roughly the flying distance. Will never be able to eliminate them, but that would certainly help.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Does that apply to native bees as well?

Mr von BEHRENS: No. Native bees are part of the ecosystem, they are very much smaller and do not readily fertilise the weeds that have grown up in concert with European bees.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Assume that you were camped on a ridge and needed to go down to a creek at the bottom of the hill every day to collect a bucket of water. You would walk down the same track every day, 365 days a year. What would be your impact on that track?

Mr von BEHRENS: Assuming I did what you suggest, there would be a track, a serious track. When we walk in an alpine area, we make sure that we never walk in each other's steps.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: If there were 365 of you at the camp and you each went down on one day to get a bucket of water, what would be the impact 12 months later? When you came back in 12 months time, would you be able to see where you had been?

Mr von BEHRENS: Of course.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: No, you would not. I dispute that, because it would have had 12 months to recover from that one day of walking down the hill and back.

Mr von BEHRENS: If that were the case the recovery would not have taken 50 years to wipe out the tracks that were there more than 50 years ago.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: But the tracks had been overused. I am querying your theory about the herbivores in the national park. It is not so much the fact that the animals were there, but the way they were managed.

Mr von BEHRENS: The reason for the exclusion of grazing in the alpine area was because of the erosion, because of the effect of it on the dams, and the additional siltation, because of the years of research in Victoria that Ian mentioned earlier. Nothing you have said so far will convince me that these are not logical and sound reasons for continuing with that policy.

(The witnesses withdrew)

GLYNDA BLUHM, Member, Alpaca Association Australia and Llama Association Australia, RMB 1471 Gundaroo Road, Sutton, and

GARY PETER ORR, Manager and Partner, Rural Conservation Service, Mount Yaven, RMB 523, Adelong, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Ms BLUHM: I am appearing in the capacity of an alpaca and llama producer. I feel that alpacas and llamas have something to offer in the control of foxes, dogs and dingoes.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Ms BLUHM: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you wish your submission to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Ms BLUHM: Yes. I have an extra piece to submit.

CHAIR: I will add that to it. Mr Orr, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr ORR: I am speaking specifically to do with our property and the newly created Ellerslie Conservation Reserve next door to us.

CHAIR: Are you conversant of the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr ORR: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Do you wish your submission to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Mr ORR: Yes.

CHAIR: If you consider at any stage during the evidence that, in the public interest, certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be seen or heard only by the Committee, the Committee will be willing to accede to your request, but the request may be overturned by vote of the Legislative Council. Would you like to make a statement, each of you in turn, in whichever order you wish?

Mr ORR: Just briefly, we bought a property about four years ago. We took on two grazing leases as well which were attached to the freehold land. Next door to our property is Ellerslie State Forest. On 1 January 2001 it was gazetted as Ellerslie Conservation Reserve. The reason why I am talking here today about our property is mainly to do with the boundary issue and to do with feral animals and the difference between the management of the grazing areas now and when we were leasing the areas with the Department of Land and Water Conservation and State Forests. We signed contracts to say that, as part of the grazing lease, we were to control feral animals and weeds. As private property owners we felt really good that we were part of the management of public land. When the areas were gazetted as a nature reserve we felt personally that it was sort of like a brick wall, that we do not have any say in management any more.

Anything I say also is not specifically against the National Parks and Wildlife Service because they have only been in the area managing it for a year. They have not really been there long enough for me to say whether I think it is good management or bad management as far as feral animals go. My concern is that our house is 50 metres from the park border. We see mobs of goats, up to 20 or 30 in a mob, walking straight past our house. These are on the other side of the fence. Because they are on the other side of the fence, I cannot do a thing about it because I am not allowed to shoot in a national park. A month or two ago I saw a feral cat sitting behind a clump of grass at a rock pool. We have a creek flowing through our place and the creek actually is next to the boundary fence between our house and the park. When the creeks dry up there is a small body of permanent water there. All the animals, native and feral, come down to this waterhole. We have a lot of common birds in our area and we also have a lot of rare and endangered species such as the turquoise parrot and the swift parrot. I have seen instances—and specifically with my own eyes—from the house where flocks of parrots have come down to drink at the water and the feral cats sit in clumps of grass, right next to the pools of water that are left. Once again I feel really terrible

when I see that cat stalking both rare or common animals and I cannot do a thing about it whereas I could get a 22 out and shoot that cat. I know that this is not going to control all the cats in the park, but that would have been one cat less and some native animal saved. That is the whole gist of my submission.

Ms BLUHM: I have been a primary producer for 25 years, raising all sorts of livestock. Initially we have had quite a lot of fox problems. We were having chooks go left, right and centre, daytime, night-time and everything else. So that was a great concern. In fact we gave up chook raising for a while because it just seemed like it was not worthwhile. At this stage we did not have ewes with lambs and so I do not know if we would have suffered losses from fox predation. Since then I have become an alpaca and llama breeder. I have around 150 alpacas and llamas. One of the things that became very apparent early in the piece was that the alpacas and llamas are extremely keen to chase foxes, dogs and, I have no doubt, dingoes, if they are around. They have been known to kill at least foxes. They are happy to protect their own species but the good news is that they are happy to protect sheep, dare I say goats and deer. I was thinking of domestic ones, not feral ones. I have heard of them attacking cats and other animals as well. I imagine that would not be feral cats because they probably would not be fast enough for a feral cat, I would not think.

I guess it would be a good measure to say that there is a difference between alpacas and llamas although it seems that most people think that they are the same thing. An alpaca stands about five feet and a llama stands about six feet. An alpaca weighs approximately 60 kilograms or 70 kilograms whereas a llama weighs approximately 150 kilograms to 200 kilograms. In their native South America, alpacas are basically used as fleece animals as we would use sheep and llamas are used as we would use a horse, mostly as a beast of burden rather than as a riding animal. You may gather that probably a llama is going to be faster, bigger, strong, et cetera and that is the case. Also, the alpacas tend to carry a lot more fleece and when they are shorn they are quite agile. But of course, when they are fully fleeced, they will be a little less agile. I am not saying that they do not do the job—they do. There was a recent program or segments on *Landline* about this and I think it was somewhere down this way where the alpacas were chasing away foxes. To my knowledge there has not been a study done in Australia but there is any amount of anecdotal evidence about alpacas and llamas chasing dogs and foxes.

I have my doubts that they would stand up to a pack of dogs. I have my doubts that anything could stand up to a pack of dogs, except a gun. I do not think that much else would. It is also fairly significant to mention that alpacas and llamas have padded feet, much like the marsupial animals have. Therefore it is considered that they have a similar impact on the ground to somebody toddling along in a pair of Nikes. In other words, they are not like sheep, cattle and horses. Some of the other benefits from alpaca and llamas being used as guardians would of course be the fibre and there is another benefit that is strictly anecdotal. I have to emphasise that it is anecdotal. It would appear from my own research and the research of a couple of other people that they actually will eat some serrated tussock.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: That is a first.

Ms BLUHM: Both Llamas (and alpacas) as well as serrated tussock are from South America, so it is not totally out of the question. Certainly they are eating serrated tussock at my place, but I do not have very much so I suspect that if I were to put them in a paddock of serrated tussock, they would probably keel over and drop dead because I just do not think there is enough food value in it. However, they are a browsing animal which means they are happy to have a little nibble here and a little nibble there. If that just helps to control serrated tussock, that cannot be a bad thing. Their attitude towards predators is something that is quite interesting. They tend to eyeball predators—for instance, a dog or a fox—and if that does not work, they tend to scream at them. They call it the alarm call. They will give chase and they will stamp on them and they will swing their necks at them, so there is a variety of things that they do. Not all of them do every one of those things, of course. A study was done in America and that was for their main predator which is coyotes. Llamas were the topic of the study, not alpacas, and that was very effective. It stated that predation was reduced from 11 per cent to 1 per cent. I think we might have a higher predatory rate around here than that, but that was the level that they produced in America. In my submission there are details of the various things that the alpacas and llamas did and who did the study.

The only problem I can see is a potential problem with anybody who uses alpacas or llamas as guardians within their sheep flock. When they round up their animals with their dogs the alpacas might decide that they are not impressed with that. Generally speaking, it is not a big issue unless the dogs work very close. For the most part they will accept their own dogs once they learn which are their dogs. That is okay; they will accept their dogs, but they do not like intruding dogs. It is fairly easy to get these animals quiet. Therefore, you could get a bucket and teach them to come to a bucket. I suspect that they may well bring all the sheep with them, if you are lucky. That is about all I would like to say. I am hoping that you will find it interesting enough to ask some questions.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: How do you shear a llama?

Ms BLUHM: The llamas are big guys. We shear them standing. We have a crush or a pen that we put them in. But many people just tie them to the fence and shear them as they stand. They are fairly quiet. They are quiet like a horse is quiet if you handle it, so it is not really an issue. Alpacas, on the other hand, are usually thrown and tied. The llamas are a bit big for that.

CHAIR: A number of people have had terrible losses. Has anyone taken up this idea of experimenting with them, apart from you?

Ms BLUHM: There certainly are people who are using alpacas and llamas on their properties, with success. If you are saying "experiment" as in a study, I do not believe there has been one done in Australia. To my knowledge there has not. If you are asking whether people are using them, yes they are. As I said, there was a segment on *Landline* about it. It was somewhere down here or perhaps towards the coast. Certainly I have been told of somebody who had 100 ewes and they got 17 lambs one year. They put in two llamas and got 100 lambs the following year. Their neighbour suggested that that might be a good idea. He said that he had done the same thing. That might be good luck but I suspect it is a bit more than good luck.

CHAIR: So that could be one non-lethal answer to reduce fatalities.

Ms BLUHM: It could be a non-lethal way. For some foxes and dogs it could well be lethal. But they usually do not come back for seconds. Our neighbours' dogs have decided that there are better places to be than our place.

CHAIR: So they act as a deterrent? In addition to frightening them off, they actually deter them from going there again?

Ms BLUHM: I think that would be the case. I used to watch a fox at our place that walked along its own little track. It used to toddle backwards and forwards along its own little path. It does not go there any more because the llamas now live in that paddock. Now it does a discrete skirting around the outside of the fence. Then when it gets to the end of the llamas' paddock it goes through the middle of the next paddock. So I think the answer is yes.

CHAIR: Have you any knowledge of maremma guard dogs and other creatures apart from alpacas and llamas?

Ms BLUHM: I am not a maremma owner. I know several people who have them. Many people speak highly of them. I have also been aware of somebody, particularly in this district, whose neighbour's maremma was attacking his alpacas. He seemed to be a little upset about that. But I think that is probably as a result of training more than anything else. I think people believe that you get this maremma, throw it in the paddock and that is it. But there is probably a little more to it than that. In the case of alpacas and llamas it is their natural instinct to protect young things. They are desperately fascinated by young lambs, young goats and things like that. Initially, you might think that nothing much is happening when you see them in a flock. Then they say, "My God, there is a baby. We have just got to love that", and they all hang about it. They are quite amazing. They are just like babysitters.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Orr, I gained the impression that in your submission you talked about the fact that locked up land does not necessarily exceed the conservation outcomes for which it was locked up. What are the alternatives for conservation areas?

Mr ORR: The words "locked up" are probably not the best words to use. I think there should be more input by neighbouring properties. I think most farmers would respect the conservation values within the national park. I would not advocate that people should just wander around and shoot any feral animal that they like, especially if there are tourists about. In our case, for example, if we see a feral animal within a kilometre of our boundary we can follow it through and do something about it. We are very much into the conservation side of things. We specifically bought our property because there are about 1,500 acres of bush and about 500 acres of cleared land on which we also run alpacas and a few cattle. There has been more co-operation by neighbours and various public authorities.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Is there an opportunity to change the way we manage heavy grazing animals—sheep, cattle alpacas or whatever—in order to increase the biodiversity of the native flora and fauna?

Mr ORR: It depends on the situation that you are talking about. In our situation we are careful not to put our domestic animals there. I specifically put electric fences around the cattle and goats. I tend to contain our domestic animals to allow the native animals a free run in our bush areas. I keep those animals separated. Any feral animals in the bush areas we have been controlling, like the goats. There are very few goats left on our property at the moment. Most of them have retreated into the nature reserve simply because I am on their case all the time. I use a rifle to euthanase them.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: A school of thought is developing that domestic animals can be managed in a way that encourages biodiversity and the enhancement of native flora and fauna over and above what a traditional farming or grazing enterprise might permit. I know quite a few people who are changing over to that style of management. It has been very successful. Is there an opportunity for farmers and graziers who are concerned about conservation issues—and I know that a lot of them are—to work in conjunction with National Parks in order to achieve a common conservation goal, rather than being at loggerheads with each other all the time?

Mr ORR: There are possibly opportunities for that. It would probably boil down to specific areas, depending on the availability of the soil or the weed situation. We have specific areas near our place that have been gazetted as national park which, quite frankly, are not viable as nature reserve. They cover such a tiny area that has all been cleared. There are a whole lot of weeds in that area. Quite frankly, it is not good. It is a bit of a waste of time. The National Parks people are going to do a land swap. I am not sure about the red tape involved in that. We will end up with this small area—a sheep paddock I will call it—and National Parks will have a larger area of bushland. I would not mind that swap.

So there are probably a few opportunities there. As far as the alpacas go, I have discovered something on our place. Prior to us not being allowed to use the grazing lease area I discovered that the alpacas love a certain weed, which is something like a dandelion. They do not touch any other plant except for the yellow flowers on that plant. There is no other way to control these weeds. The alpacas have gone through the area and cleaned up all the seed from this plant. From my experience alpacas could be used in weed control and possibly in a commercial sheep operation. If you are bordering a national park and you had a few alpacas and llamas they would protect your sheep from the dogs.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Has your experience in using alpacas as sheep guards been based only on using female alpacas? I have the report of a study that was undertaken in 1994 by the Iowa State university on guard llamas, which found that there were no problems reported for female llamas used in the study but there was a problem with at least a quarter of the male llamas that were used as they were attempting to mate it with the ewes, sometimes fatally. The information that you have given us today seems to reveal that using these animals as sheep guards seems to work. Have you been using only female alpacas, or have you been using both sexes?

Ms BLUHM: As our female alpacas are worth quite a lot of money we tend to consider that the males are the guardians. They are more expendable. I am aware of the fact that some people believe that males are better as guardians. I would not particularly agree with that. I have heard that some whole Llama/alpaca males, particularly if they have too much libido, and are without their own species to mate with, may try to mate with the ewes. This would be very traumatic for the ewes. Of the people I have spoken to in Australia nobody has ever said that this has been an issue for them. I have only heard of it occurring in America. Although it is not something that all Llama/alpaca males do, I think it would be a better move to use neutered males (wethers or geldings) that way it would not be a problem at all.

(The witnesses withdrew)

DEBORAH ANNE RUSSELL, Primary Producer, Rockforest, Adaminaby,

TIMOTHY GREGORY RUSSELL, Primary Producer, Rockforest, Adaminaby, and

NOELINE ALICE FRANKLIN, Housewife, Tumut, Brindabella, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Mrs Russell, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mrs RUSSELL: As a private citizen.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mrs RUSSELL: Yes.

CHAIR: Mr Russell, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr RUSSELL: As a private citizen.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr RUSSELL: Yes.

CHAIR: Ms Franklin, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Ms FRANKLIN: As a private citizen.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms FRANKLIN: Yes.

CHAIR: There are two separate submissions. Do you wish those submissions to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Ms FRANKLIN: Yes.

Mr RUSSELL: Yes.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents that you may wish to present should not be made public, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request, but the Legislative Council may overturn that. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr RUSSELL: Yes. I was born and raised on the land. I am fifth generation in the area, and third generation on my property, at Adaminaby. I have had 21 years experience as a noxious animal control with the rural lands protection board as Cooma and the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. I have been on both sides of the fence. I am an effective land-holder and have had the job of eradicating wild dogs. My heart goes out to the landowner who is devastated by wild dogs, but at the same time I have a responsibility to be professional in my job. I know the feeling of not sleeping at night, worrying about my sheep that I may find killed or maimed the next morning. This is the International Year of the Outback and I would like to see governments and our city counterparts celebrate by supporting us in our need for controlling feral animals and protecting our native flora and fauna.

It is us as a nation who have a duty of care. People on the land are caretakers, we love and respect the land and we want to pass on our knowledge, and our property, to the next generation. I have learned that the best classroom is at the feet of an elderly person. Let us talk to the rural people who live in and experience life in the high country. If we sat back and listened, we would learn that this once beautiful place is slowly being destroyed by feral animals, weed infestation and a lack of fuel reduction. Let us return to good, old commonsense—something we will never learn from a textbook.

Ms FRANKLIN: I come from Brindabella, 60 kilometres west of Canberra in the northern part of the Snowy Mountains. My family has lived and raised livestock there for 160 years. Much of our holdings have recently been assessed for wilderness and conservation values and passed easily. We had it looking a lot better 30 years ago, before the dogs hit us, compromising our management and disrupting the wildlife which we have harboured and nurtured. I would like to give the Committee an insight on how the local community has achieved high conservation values in the region and point out how the future is looking uncertain.

Basically I had planned to take the Committee through what I believe is the history as our family has seen it. We were among some of the earliest families that made their way out of the Sydney Basin. We found open forest and vacant grassland. From cross-referencing folklore with written records in the Mitchell Library we have come to the realisation that when we arrived the Aborigines were greatly compromised by a smallpox epidemic. Their management of the land was compromised as a result. In those days two things were happening: they were unable to burn the habitat and maintain a green, fresh grassland; their ability to suppress wild dogs got out of hand. As I understand it, about 4,000 years ago the fishing traders from our north brought in dogs as a ration animal. They had got out of hand at the time of settlement.

There is good evidence to suggest that our families and the Aborigines were on the same difficult path. We worked together to maintain a continuity of management. We maintained an open forest, we restored the grassland by not only traditional burning but augmented that with grazing of large animals. There is good evidence to suggest that Australia lost its megafauna about 35,000 years ago. I believe that burning had to occur, as far as the Aborigines were concerned to maintain their habitat. They started to develop a burning regime to make up for that loss of megafauna in the ecological niche. Possibly there were major accidental fires in those days which knocked out the casuarina forest and brought in the eucalypt.

Having worked very hard in trying to understand the Aboriginal way of life, both cultures were having a lot of difficulties. When we arrived I think the Aborigines were suffering starvation, they were under siege from wild dogs. I do not think that there is any doubt that if any toddlers walked from their camp, or our children, they were taken by packs of dogs. In those days there were a lot of press releases of people falling off horses who were taken by packs of dogs before rescue parties could find them. There is a lot of evidence to suggest that the dog population, on settlement, was well out of hand. Our families, using traditional methods and linking that with other cultural methods of land management, restored the habitat. The wildlife has recovered.

A lot of people will say that in the old days kangaroos were rare. Land-holders are seeing the reversal of the recovery we achieved because of the wild dogs. In my area the echidna have gone. To find an echidna quill in a dog scat, you need to go to the dog territory front, because in our place it is down to wallaby and possibly kangaroo. As I talk to land-holders, I have heard of a major succession of attrition of wildlife. I am happy to take the Committee through that succession. I have tried to come to terms with a model which basically suggests that predation has been more or less the effecter in the spiral. Other people have mentioned that today. Predation results in stagnation of plant life as the herbivores are being removed. That stagnation has a feedback loop to starvation of grazing animals.

As the dogs clear the national park, we are getting down the spiral towards an incineration cycle, which the Sydney Basin is well into now. We are getting very hot fires over a large area and they are producing a few flammable species. The fire frequency and intensity is increasing and we are losing our wet creek ecologies, losing our wildlife. Quite honestly, reversing the cycle will be extremely difficult and long term if the situation is not attended to as a matter of urgency. Local land managers have a reasonable insight and we feel that the situation is nailbiting every summer. It is critical that we reverse the situation if we are serious about retaining bio-diversity, water catchment values and certainly retaining the social structures, the knowledge and skills within our local community, which have a depth of experience, possibly going back 60,000 years.

There is a lot of evidence which I have drawn from the scientific field and folklore. I have tried to put it together in a workable model. A lot of questions were asked today regarding what sort of impact wild dogs and/or foxes are having on wildlife. In seven years breeding, a pair of dogs can multiply to 32 dogs. If you assume that a pair of dogs can occupy a territory of 2,400 hectares, those 32 dogs have to either hasten the wallaby multiplication factor or blow out their territory in the order of 40,000 hectares. That is within seven years and that is assuming that any of the female pups are not breeding. If we assume that 50 per cent were female pups are hopping on the breeding bandwagon, as it were, within that seven-year period there will be 195 dogs—hopefully restricted to that 6,000 acres, or we would need a territory expansion to 272,000 hectares.

I guess if you are talking about sustainable systems, I believe that park expansion needs to occur in the order of about 300,000 hectares for every two dogs in seven years. I guess the other thing that I believe comes out of this

model is that according to our observation the wild dogs are possibly building up because there is a rolling expansion of park. We believe that our conservation achievements in terms of wildlife which we have noted over the years, are being cleared by these dogs. They are breeding up and they are moving on. I believe that if you look at the dog density from the centre of the park through to the perimeter, you would get a concentration of dogs on the outside now basically because of food. We are harbouring a lot of animals not only in terms of the native populations but also a lot of animals that would be mustered out onto adjacent land-holdings. We are not only feeding the dogs with our sheep, but also we are feeding the refugee wildlife and it goes on from there.

Again I am quite happy to talk in detail about my observations and certainly the findings of a survey that I have done. I am more than happy to give a copy of that to the Committee for members' perusal. I have looked at economic, social and environmental factors from an adjacent land-holder's point of view. If there are any queries at a later date, I am more than happy to try to elaborate.

The Hon. MALCOLM JONES: Could you just expand a little bit on your comments where you have linked the expansion of dog populations down the spiral on your diagram to the deterioration of the environment and its ability to withstand major fires?

Ms FRANKLIN: Yes. Most of the stockmen I have spoken to said that in their days as Snowy lessees, there were equivalent wildlife populations in terms of stocking rates to sheep. I have roughed out the amount of dry matter that 200,000 sheep—counted over the Tumut Bridge headed for the northern part of the Kosciusko National Park—would consume in the seven months that they were here. It is in the order of 2,670 semitrailers of dry matter. If you assume that kangaroos would eat the equivalent, it can be seen that after a while there would be a considerable quantity of dry matter that had built up and that is basically what we are observing. We used to have in the order of five tonnes to eight tonnes per hectare. Now I believe it is well in excess of 80 tonnes to 150 tonnes to the hectare. Firefighters believe that they might have ability to direct a fire at 20 tonnes per hectare, so it is far in excess of anything that we could fight. It is uniform across the mountains, unfortunately.

We have an understorey. I know it is mentioned here that an understorey has recurred since grazing was taken out but, as I understand it, unless they want to create an artefact, it is basically not what we found. It was open forest and open grassland and it was basically the rabbits overgrazing that brought about that understorey. When we are talking about overgrazing on the mountains, it was basically the rabbit and it was the stockman who got the blame. I think what is required is a literature review of the scientific work that was done around the time of the Snowy scheme. I would certainly like to review a lot of their findings. I believe that a lot of them were unsubstantiated and based on circumstantial evidence. Linking cause and effect, I think, was fairly problematic and some of the conclusions were certainly not as local community members remember it.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Mr Russell, my question relates to the part of your submission where you say that you do not believe that there is an alpine dingo. We heard earlier from a representative of the National Parks and Wildlife Service who said that genetic testing that has been done so far shows that 20 per cent to 25 per cent of dogs' carcasses that have been tested have come from alpine dingoes. Were you here this morning for this morning's session?

Mr RUSSELL: No.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I mention that because there were a couple of different lots of evidence. Some people said that there was a lot of hybridisation with wild dogs and a lot of other people said that there was not any. In your submission you state that you feel that dogs that you have been tracking and sighting in the bush have become larger in size and less intimidated by human presence. You also state that the dogs that you have caught seem to have been crossed with various other breeds of dog. Can you answer two things for me: Do you think that there is a hybridisation process going on? A few people have said that pig hunters are leaving dogs behind in parks and the dogs are mixing with the wild dogs that are already there. Second, have you physically noticed any change in the look of the dogs you have been trapping? This morning we heard that there are yellow dogs and white dogs. Looking to the photographs, there seems to be a lot of similarity among the most of them, but just from my point of view a few of them look like a domestic dog that one would see in the suburbs. Can you give us your views first on whether you think the pig dogs are crossbreeding, and if that is the case, whether it is a more recent phenomenon?

Mr RUSSELL: As you see in the photographs, there must be a certain amount of crossbreeding to get such a variety of colours. What I have found interesting with the wild dogs is that they come in, in stages. Like in one year you can get a run of brindles and in another year you can get a lot of whites, and then you get a big run on the

yellows. They sort of vary from year to year. I do not know why, but that seems to be how it happens. But as far as direct evidence of pig doggers or pig dogs crossing with them is concerned, I cannot give you any really direct evidence. There is only one thing I would mention and that is that in the photograph album you have got one dog that is very clearly a bull terrier type of dog. He was a wild dog as such, so there has to be some sort of crossbreeding anyhow, and that goes right back to prior to the Snowy days, I suppose. It is a big if. What is a pure dingo?

As you can see, there is a large variety of different colours, sizes, shapes and I found that in recent years they have become a little bit bigger. Some of them are quite a massive type of dog. I was told by a land-holder only yesterday that at Tantangara Dam there was one that was virtually going to hop in the vehicle with him. They called it down and they are getting so quiet that they are just starting to become domesticated. Why, I do not know, but they have just sort of become half sort of domesticated. I do not know whether that answers your question.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Quiet, or fearless?

Mr RUSSELL: Maybe fearless to a certain degree. I cannot understand why, but a lot of them seem to have become very fearless. What it is, I do not know.

CHAIR: I see from the photographs that you use traps to a certain extent. Are these soft-jaw traps, are they?

Mr RUSSELL: Yes. A lot of those photographs are from prior to enactment of the legislation that was put in place. Now we have got a good soft-jaw traps put in place, which is a very good sign. It is still a double springer, but they are a rubber-jaw trap. There is no steel-jaw trap any more.

CHAIR: Do you get many non-target species in the soft-jaw traps?

Mr RUSSELL: That issue is very close to my heart, the non-target species. As a professional dogger, I take specific care to avoid the non-target species. A good professional dogger knows how to go about setting up to avoid the non-target species.

CHAIR: Between logs—that sort of thing—so that you would not get a kangaroo, but you would get a dog.

Mr RUSSELL: You have to select your site. If you want to set up in a tree and there is a possum using that tree, what is the point in it? You would pick a better site. You have to be careful around waterways and various other areas where animals are tracking such as wallabies and whatever else. The telltale signs are there, so one takes particular notice and care to avoid the non-target species. It is important to me to go out with a couple of traps, not a lot, and spend all day. You might only get two, three, or four traps set, but you really have to pick a special site where you are going to pick up a dog whereas fewer traps are less likely to pick up non-target species anyhow. It is a bit of a specialty, how you go about it.

CHAIR: How many dogs are caught by trap and how many are shot?

Mr RUSSELL: Shooting is only an opportunity thing, really. It is only by luck.

CHAIR: So it is mostly done by soft-jaw trap?

Mr RUSSELL: Yes, mostly by soft-jaw trap.

CHAIR: So would you track 10 in a night or 10 in a day or something? How would it work? How many traps do you have? How often do you set them? How often do you check them?

Mr RUSSELL: It depends on the area. Usually my round could be seven or eight traps but if it is a bigger area I could go in with 12 traps. I select the areas very positively. I do not need many traps at all. As far as checking them is concerned, by law you have to go round every day now anyway. But the thing with the dog is that they run on a pattern, and the pattern is that he might come in and kill every two days or he might come in once a week or once a fortnight. That makes it very difficult for me as a professional dogger. I have so many restrictions on me. I cannot go back into the park any more than four kilometres whereas the dog can go back 10 kilometres or 15 kilometres. I have to wait for him to come back. I am not allowed to go in after him, so he has got all the advantages behind him.

CHAIR: How successful is it? How many dogs do you catch per week in the traps?

Mr RUSSELL: That is again going to depend on the population.

CHAIR: Of course.

Mr RUSSELL: It depends. You have got to select your good sites and hopefully you might happen to have a dog in that same trap every time you go round. But you have to ensure that you target that particular spot where you are not going to pick up non-target species and it is kept open and it is there for a dog, nothing else.

CHAIR: Do you think it is more effective doing that than mound baitings, for example? Do you have any view on that?

Mr RUSSELL: I feel that they go hand in hand. One needs the other. They are all methods that have got to be used, absolutely. To me, trying to do a control method around a boundary of a national park is absolutely a waste of time. Really you have got to get back into the park, further back into where the problem is. Therefore you only target specific areas where you are not putting a big impact on a great area. You pick small areas where you are not going to have a big effect on native species as such.

CHAIR: If another 10 of you were employed around the area where there are very big dog kills, would that have a significant impact? It is probably an obvious question.

Mr RUSSELL: Very much so. I think it is about time that full-time doggers were put on. When I say "full time" I mean full time, not 10 hours or 20 hours per week. I mean that they should be a full-time employee. Because of the rules and regulations that apply, there has to be a lot more permanent doggers put in place and they will have a big effect. For example, in my area, thank heavens commonsense has prevailed and the National Parks and Wildlife Service has finally put a fellow on full time. That will have a big impact on my livelihood because he is probably able to manage most of the problems out of my paddock.

CHAIR: In relation to non-target species, out of the so many traps that are set, how many would contain dogs and how many would contain wallabies or whatever? What proportion would be dogs?

Mr RUSSELL: I hope to think it would be 95 per cent dogs.

CHAIR: So the 5 per cent which are non-target species, can you release those relatively unharmed?

Mr RUSSELL: Yes, particularly with the rubber-jaw traps, yes.

CHAIR: They are relatively okay?

Mr RUSSELL: Yes. The wombat is the most difficult of the whole lot. They are curious. They cannot help themselves. They have to come and have a look. Most times they will spring a trap before they get caught and normally they are not a problem. They are easily released. It does not really have much effect on them.

CHAIR: It is important from a humane point of view that if you can catch them in a soft trap you are able to release the non-target species and presumably shoot the ones which are the target animals—

Mr RUSSELL: Yes.

CHAIR: —resulting in instantaneous death, which is probably the most humane way of killing them, and probably the most effective.

Mr RUSSELL: Yes.

CHAIR: It is the most effective and most humane way of controlling unwanted dog populations?

Mr RUSSELL: Absolutely, yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: What else do you catch? I wish to enlarge on your answer. You say that 95 per cent of the catch are dogs, and you mentioned wombats. What else?

Mr RUSSELL: You are going into an area and it depends on how many native species are there. If you have a big population of wallabies there is always a chance that they are going to step in a trap. You cannot get away from that. That is the unfortunate part about it. I always look at it this way. I will take out one dog and get rid of him. He probably gets more wallabies than I will ever get.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: So a wallaby is not likely to survive a trap?

Mr RUSSELL: It depends. You have to remember that you have a lot of wallabies there.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Is there anything else in the traps, or do wallabies and wombats just about cover it?

Mr RUSSELL: There are other target species, such as foxes and cats.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: What other target species do you pick up in the traps without meaning to?

Mr RUSSELL: Basically, those are the heavy marsupials. So if your traps are set right and set in a proper manner even a possum will not set it off. But if you pick a tree which has a possum, you will not set your trap in that tree because he might jump down onto the trap and set it off. Even if you weight the trap, he would set it off. So you try to avoid those sorts of situations.

CHAIR: So you need professional training to know where to set those traps and to train other people?

Mr RUSSELL: I think that there should be some sort of training. Because the issue involves non-target species I think it is important that others are shown how to trap. We must avoid the non-target species and reduce the problem that we have.

CHAIR: And they must be dispatched humanely.

Mr RUSSELL: Absolutely.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.47 p.m.)