



Your strong and independent voice for livestock producers

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**Inquiry into the Management of overabundant and Pest species in South Australia.**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry into the management of overabundant and pest species in South Australia. This is an issue of importance across the Livestock SA industry.

Livestock SA was formed in 2013 to represent the interests of beef cattle, sheep and goat producers in South Australia. Currently Livestock SA has 3,500 members.

A co-ordinated effort remains the key to effective pest animal control across South Australia; along with appropriate implementation and enforcement regimes (i.e. underpinned by adequate resourcing), including adequate control measures on public lands. It is critical that the SA Government support statewide priorities and co-ordination, to bolster the investments made at the regional level using NRM levy funding.

For more information or to discuss this matter further, please contact Deane Crabb on 8297 2299 or [dcrabb@livestocksa.org.au](mailto:dcrabb@livestocksa.org.au).

We look forward to ongoing involvement and discussions on these matters.

Yours sincerely

Joe Keynes  
President

## **Management of Overabundant and Pest Species in South Australia**

Livestock SA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Natural Resources Committee's Inquiry into the Management of Overabundant and Pest Species in South Australia.

Livestock SA welcomes the opportunity to verbally discuss with the Committee the management of overabundant and pest species in South Australia, or invasive animals as we would prefer to call them. This would also be an opportunity to expand and elaborate on this written submission.

### **Coordinated effort remains key to effective pest animal control across South Australia**

Livestock SA believes that a coordinated effort remains key to effective pest animal control across South Australia. There needs to be an Invasive Species Committee which is the peak body to consider all species, and which has the ability and charter to prioritise with a whole-of-landscape perspective.

Too often in the past, there has been a silo mentality, with a range of bodies including NRM Boards and species-specific committees dealing with specific species without considering the overall impact environmentally and economically for the whole State. While these bodies have done good work in dealing with a specific pest and often within a specific region, as part of a total package it has not necessarily been so successful. Managing wild dogs is a good example with the SA Wild Dog Advisory Group and the SA Dog Fence Board both working on dealing with wild dogs, in addition to various NRM regional activities and industry programs, but there has not been an overall coordinated approach.

At one stage there was a Wildlife Advisory Committee, which for example oversaw such groups as the Kangaroo Management Reference Group. This needs to be reinstated and expanded to also include feral pest species. While the ultimate aim may be eradication of feral pests, for native animals it is the effective management to ensure that there is a sustainable population and not an overabundance which can have a detrimental effect particularly on the environment.

In many instances, State Government has abrogated its responsibility and left it solely to NRM Boards which have limited funds and competing priorities. It is hoped that the new Landscape Act will include recognition that issues regarding invasive animals do not stop at NRM boundaries and there is often a Statewide public good in controlling these for environmental, economic and community benefit.

### **The current situation**

Livestock SA is the peak body for sheep, beef cattle and goat producers in this State with approximately 3,500 members. Most of these producers have had to deal with, and for many are continually battling one or more invasive animals. Pest animal control remains a significant issue for Livestock SA members, with results from Livestock SA's recent 2018 annual survey highlighting it was a "major issue" for 35% of producers.

**Wild dog** predation was classed as a key issue for 20% of all producers who responded to the annual survey, but in a region-by-region perspective it rose to be a key issue for 46% of producers in the pastoral regions. **Kangaroos, deer, pigs and goat** management were also raised as areas of significant concern by members.

Grazing pressure and competition for feed from pest animal species have been key issues for producers right across the State particularly currently given the dry seasonal conditions across many regional areas. Invasive

animals are also drinking valuable water, particularly where producers are paying for expensive mains water from SA Water. One Livestock SA member estimates it is costing him at least \$7,000 to water kangaroos.

But it is a much broader issue than just affecting holding capacity or stocking rates and Livestock SA is continuing to advocate for a more coordinated response. We believe a collective and coordinated approach is key to the control of all pest animal species in South Australia and is vital for the ongoing management of these animals. In many cases there are prescribed control regimes in place but the way in which they are policed means there is no compulsion to follow the rules.

For example, Livestock SA has not been able to find any instances in the past decade where **feral/farmed deer** control has been policed. In many cases escapees from private landholders can be the cause of wild populations. This often means it then becomes a regional problem before anything can be done. However, after an extended period of lobbying Livestock SA is expecting to see greater implementation of control for feral deer within State forestry plantations by the end of the year. We have also continued to call for a better compliance on the control and fencing of farmed deer and improved coordination of cull programs.

**Kangaroos** have been an ongoing issue with the dry season highlighting this issue. On inside country kangaroos are having a significant impact on recovering pastures, with 75% of weekly Livestock SA survey respondents indicating kangaroos were a significant problem on their properties.

Livestock SA has been working with industry, including with kangaroo processing companies to enhance current harvesting programs, now only 10% of possible numbers are harvested. There are currently only 10 fulltime kangaroo harvesters and 20 to 30 part-time workers, compared with 130 a decade ago. Various factors have played into this decline in harvester/shooter numbers, and in the number of kangaroos harvested. We are working with industry and would like to see an extension to the zones in which the commercial harvest of kangaroos can be conducted. There also needs to be a reduction in the current fees and registration costs that commercial harvesters must undertake, so it is more in line with interstate charges. There also needs to be better promotion of kangaroos into export markets as well as domestically.

South Australia is an expensive State to process due to distance from field processor collection point and they are not in clusters like in the Eastern States. To create efficiencies, there is the need for field processor to be able to operate across State boundaries. This is currently restricted as there is the need for an 'export' licence to sell the carcasses interstate. This is a restriction of trade.

In addition to the low numbers harvested, the male bias has created a compounding effect. By having a pure male take, along with a price per kilogram payment system with no grading process for quality, and a \$ per head government royalty, the system is forcing the field processor to take the biggest male animal. If only mature males are taken, the breeding capacity is increasing along with the change of hierarchal effect as there is no dominant male in the family. There is the need for a true cull to be achieved and not a minimal harvest.

Last year there were two kangaroo forums with the Department for Environment and Water, one at Yunta organised by the SAAL NRM and one in Adelaide with plenty of suggestions put on the table. However as yet nothing has come from these forums. The pastoral regions and adjacent rangelands would be in better shape if there was not an overabundance of kangaroos.

**Feral pigs** also remain a concern, with their indiscriminate appearance across many regions in South Australia. It is worrying that people who have no understanding of the long-term impact of feral pigs

continue to appear to release them for hunting purposes. They are highly destructive animals, which can cause damage to infrastructure, grazing pressure and disease risks.

**Feral goat** control remains an ongoing concern, for pastoral producers. The strategic review and consideration of this resource remains ongoing.

There are also a range of other overabundant and pest animals including **rabbits, foxes, crows, feral cats, wombats, wallabies and Cape Barren geese**.

A Livestock SA member in the Adelaide Hills has highlighted the **rabbit** problem which is in plague proportions in the Wistow/Bugle Ranges area of the Adelaide Hills. He has reported that the last release of the virus was some time ago and it had only limited effect in this area, although it seems to have had good results at Murray Bridge. Part of the problem is that subdivision has brought many lifestyle people into the area who have no interest in food production and consequently make no attempt to limit pest species. He used Pindone oats this year to good effect, but the neighbours' rabbits simply moved in to replace those that were exterminated.

**Feral cats** spread livestock diseases (sarcocystis and toxoplasmosis) that impact primary production and profitability, causing substantial economic cost. On Kangaroo Island, where the cost of feral cats on its sheep industry is estimated to be \$2 million annually, there is a feral cat eradication program aiming to eradicate the pest by 2030. The program is currently funded by the Australian Government with in-kind support from the [Department for Environment and Water](#) and further contributions and support from [Agriculture KI](#), [PIRSA](#), [Nature Foundation South Australia](#) and other private philanthropic donors. If the program is to succeed more funding is required.

Also, on Kangaroo Island, specific invasive animals include **wallabies, possums and koalas**. Kangaroos, wallabies and possums should be considered equal in an across animal plan for the Island. Possums are a suspected cause for the loss of native trees, as well as the risk of carrying and spreading disease and contaminating livestock feedstuffs and water supplies.

**Wombats** are another invasive species that is increasing in numbers and spreading to areas where they have not been seen before. There have been various programs established to assist the farming community to coexist with wombats and to try and develop and implement alternatives to wombat culling. A Livestock SA member near Morgan estimates that he has had to reduce his sheep stocking rate by 20%. In addition to the impact on grazing, wombats are opening up the old rabbit warrens which were ripped years ago. This has now allowed rabbits to come back and coinhabit the holes. The holes also give a haven for foxes and wild dogs to shelter and breed. Where wombats dig holes immediately under fences these become unstable as well as burying fence wires that then rust out therefore breaking. For landowners this can mean unstable fences can allow livestock to stray onto roads leaving them liable if their livestock are hit by a motorist. There is the dilemma, that fences cannot be shifted as wombats will again dig under these, but landowners are not allowed to destroy warrens. For those with wombats on their properties in plague proportions, there is a permit system to allow culling, but this is considered bureaucratic and ineffectual. For more comments on wombats, see Appendix 1.

It is noted that the abundance of established invasive species, such as **feral rabbits, foxes, wild dogs, pigs and goats**, is getting far worse according to the latest State Government report, *Tracking changes in South Australia's environment*.

## Is there a solution?

Livestock SA understands that unlike previous Inquiries into similar issues, the current Inquiry is not focussing on a specific species. It is looking at the management frameworks for overabundant species of any variety to investigate the efficacy of existing responses to the issues, and to investigate whether novel approaches would be alternatively more effective.

As part of a coordinated approach, Livestock SA makes the following suggestions/recommendations:

- One of the difficulties has been that those dealing with many of these species within government are based in Biosecurity SA but can be answerable to either the Department of Environment and Water or Primary Industries and Regions SA with often conflicting demands. Livestock SA believe these officers should be solely responsible to PIRSA.
- For many invasive animals, there are well-founded prescribed plans in place, but these are not enforced and policed with adequate penalties for those not abiding by the strategies in place.
- Currently when applying for destruction permits the landowner has to nominate the persons doing this at the time of application. The shooter (if not the landholder) must then apply for a hunting permit. If landowners are trying to utilise the Sporting Shooters volunteers to assist, this is unrealistic. It is perfectly acceptable to pay someone to do it, but volunteer shooters are discriminated against. A much better system would be to issue the destruction permit to landholders, who can then engage whomever they choose to carry out the destruction, provided they have a valid gun licence for an appropriate firearm type.
- The current number of animals per destruction permit varies, but 1000 would be a better number, especially in the pastoral areas.
- In the case of wild dogs, at this year's Livestock SA AGM a motion was unanimously carried for the replacement of the Dog Fence over the next five years. While the livestock industries, particularly the sheep industries, benefit from an effective barrier stopping wild dogs from moving southwards, and are prepared to pay a significant proportion towards this replacement, it must be recognised that the general population also benefit. If wild dogs reach the Adelaide Hills for example, not only would they be very difficult to control, but residents may find that they can no longer keep dogs and their other pets safe.
- There is supposedly currently a review of the State's feral goat management policy and feedback was sought earlier this year from pastoralists on the viability of temporary district goat depots as a potential management tool. The potential establishment of such depots were first raised during a SA Arid Lands NRM and Livestock SA forum held in Port Augusta in December 2016. Almost two years later nothing has happened.
- Within a coordinated approach, for some species there is a need for a specific short-term group to be established to focus on the issues with that species. For example, there is a need to establish a South Australian Wombat Management Reference Group or some such body similar to the reference group for kangaroos, so that there is then an opportunity to focus solely on how to manage the increase in the wombat population in various parts of the State. This body should have a fixed term,

perhaps 10 years to focus on the issue and once good practices are in place to pass back to the peak body.

- Particularly for the pastoral region, there is an urgent need for the development of total grazing pressure management plans that do not adversely impact landowners and their land use but identifies and quantifies the effect of invasive species on their businesses.
- There needs to be consideration, particularly for the pastoral region, of a joint project between Livestock SA, Pastoral Board and SA Arid Lands NRM Board to carry out monitoring of manmade waterpoints on pastoral properties to gain a greater appreciation of the impact of pest species on the environment as well as the water costs. This includes an assessment of the impact of each grazing species through finding out what they eat and then comparing where they are eating the same thing as direct competition to each other.
- There is an urgent need for extra resources for more research and development work in relation to management of invasive species. Too often this is left to universities with limited funding from non-government sources such as from the Foundation for a Rabbit-Free Australia.

## **Appendix 1: SOUTHERN HAIRY NOSED WOMBATS**

*Material provided by David Lindner, Wonga Pastoral Co, Morgan.*

Recently I made a presentation to a Wombat Forum held in Adelaide where they heard about many of the research activities about wombats around Australia on the various species. The pitch of my presentation was about being a farmer and our issues. A couple of my main points to start off was to explain that these days I do not believe that our core business is cropping or grazing livestock. I believe it is real estate as it is our largest valued investment. And our profession is not being a farmer or grazier who grows various types of crops or grazes livestock as they are all now separate enterprises. Our profession is land management which ties in neatly with our real estate asset.

In expanding on our need to look after our main asset, our focus is on good management of our natural resource. In a natural rangeland environment, we need to grow native grasses as this is the most essential aspect of having a healthy environment which creates a diverse and healthy diverse ecosystem. In other words, real biodiversity.

I then outlined a project we did on our property on the effects of wait-a-while (a native acacia).

The picture below shows the wait-a-while bush with a drip line.



Even in a good season, this drip line is quite distinct and effectively this land is no longer productive due to the grass not being able to establish as the bush has robbed the soil of required moisture. Then we did a basic analysis of how much area is each bush affecting and what determines the size of the drip line. We established that the drip line is equal to double the diameter of the bush e.g. a 1m diameter bush would have a 2m diameter drip line.

The following table shows the area that the actual bush covers plus the drip line which is an area of little to no productive capacity.

Table 8: Estimated total effected area for differing plant diameters

Plant diameter	Drip line	Total area affected
1m	1m	7m <sup>2</sup>
2m	2m	28m <sup>2</sup>
3m	3m	64m <sup>2</sup>
4m	4m	113m <sup>2</sup>

The following table shows the affected area when total bush density is calculated.

Table 10: Estimated total coverage (m<sup>2</sup>) of Wait-a-While, including drip line

Plant Diameter	Plant Densities (number of bushes/ha)	
	100	300
1m	176m <sup>2</sup>	530m <sup>2</sup>
2m	706m <sup>2</sup>	4771m <sup>2</sup>
3m	7853m <sup>2</sup>	23561m <sup>2</sup>
4m	25446m <sup>2</sup>	76338m <sup>2</sup>

You will note that if there are 100 bushes with 3m diameter, over 75% of the hectare has no productive capacity. Therefore, the following is imperative.

Obviously, as plant density increases, and plant width increases, the amount of land occupied by Wait-a-While also increases. What is important to note is that a small increase in either density or plant size can have a large impact on the amount of land evaded by the species. As the effected area increases, the amount of grazeable and productive land decreases. If stocking rate is not effectively reduced in accordance to the encroaching rate of Wait-a-while, grazing pressure can quickly escalate above its means.

Now to bring it back to wombats. The following picture is wait-a-while on the left and a wombat hole with its grazing halo on the right.

## Compare drip line to grazing halo



The wombat hole is just to the left and to the rear of the tree. The grey area in the back ground is dry native spear grass (same as around the wait-a-while). This grazing halo also does not get a chance to recover as when rains germinate the native grasses the wombats immediately graze very low and do not let it get established or set seed. I am noticing in some areas that the feed composition is changing to less palatable species such as bindii and increasing incidence of weeds due to soil disturbance. The more holes in the warren the larger the grazing halo.

The following picture on the left is another wombat warren with a small grazing halo and on the right is a close up of the dry spear grass near the above hole where wombats have heavily grazed the native pasture.



The other problem with wombats is that they are opening up the old rabbit warrens which we ripped years ago. This has now allowed rabbits to come back and once again habit the holes. The holes also give a haven for foxes and wild dogs to shelter and breed.

Next is damage to a fence where the holes are immediately under the fence making it unstable with the holes being 1.5m deep at their entrance. The dilemma is that the fence wires get buried and rust out therefore breaking. This issue along with the unstable fence is likely to allow our sheep to stray onto a road and I am liable if they get hit by a motorist. I cannot shift the fence as they will again dig under it. I am not allowed to destroy the warren. So how do I deal with it?

Total impact on grazing and our business. Using the real DSE rating, I have put our sheep at 1.2 DSE which is based on having an actual sheep grazing on 3.25 ha. A wombat has an estimated DSE rate of 0.5 as per metabolic rate. But this needs to be increased due to the reduction of the productive capacity due to their bare earth warren and grazing halo. It could be easily argued that I could have to reduce my livestock capacity by 1 sheep for every 4 warrens in a paddock at a conservative estimate. But without any control of the population, this could double every 2 years. I have had to reduce my sheep stocking rate in one paddock by 20%.



But to fully understand the pressure on the natural resources we need to take a wider picture. In the land system where the wombats are increasing, we have enormous pressure on the natural resources.

Per a square km, we should run 30 sheep or 36 DSE (@1.2). But there are also –

- 25 kangaroos or 16 DSE (@ 0.625) (often closer to 40 or 25 DSE)
- 8 wombats or 4 DSE (@ 0.5) plus their warren effect
- 8 rabbits or 1 DSE (@ 0.125) plus their warren effect.

So, in total we are feeding 57 DSE or 47 actual sheep plus the warren effect. The 3 other grazing species have increased the grazing pressure on the land by over 50%. The land or our business cannot sustain this long term.

The permit system to cull is a farce. To apply we need to fill out a 3-page form which asks questions which no-one can answer and asks ambiguous questions about what firearms are being used when the codes of practice states what is to be used. This form must be filled out fully each time and for most NPWS districts has to be lodged in a paper form. It can take 6 weeks to receive a permit to cull from the time of application. Then the numbers permitted to cull is laughable and if adhered to would make no difference to the population or mitigate the problem. To get a permit to cull 10 wombats when removing 100 would make little impact is not acceptable. We have a problem of total grazing pressure and the only way to fix it is by removing mouths eating feed. As part of the permit process, we receive the relevant codes of practice, but sometimes they are the old out-of-date ones, a living with wildlife brochure which is farcical as it does not deal with any real land management issue and a sheet of paper outlining why permits are granted. Again, this paper is nonsensical as we need to reduce the total grazing pressure, but the paper states “That the purpose of a permit is to allow people to reduce the impact caused by wildlife, not to reduce wildlife populations.”

If we want to keep land holders on side, we all need to be on the same page. Also, land holders are really an honest group of people, but they should not be forced into a situation by a government department to constantly lie so they can have some legal coverage for what must be done.

Looking forward, we need to establish a state coordination structure. The SHN Wombat is our state emblem and we really know very little about them. And they are going rampant. Spreading into new areas at a high rate and even the colonies that have been stable for decades have expanded in recent years. Land holders are at a disadvantage at the moment as the whole agenda is being driven by the preservation groups who will not recognise that the SNH species is not endangered and they do not want to recognise that the species is as widespread as it is and causing land management issues. They are not a cuddly pet, they are a wild animal. To try to get around some of these issues, we need to knock down some big walls and get sensible people around a table, so we can establish a clear and agreed plan based on landscape management. With this, we require a coordinated and funded scientific sector working towards studying required aspects not just aspects which may interest someone with virtually no tangible outcome. We all have valuable knowledge, so we need a format to get this collective knowledge to work for everyone’s benefit. On 20 September 2012 a forum was held with an agreed outcome by all stakeholders was that a committee structure be set up to take the management of the Southern Hairy Nosed Wombat to the next level. The following was proposed.

A State steering committee (reference group) similar to the Kangaroo Management Reference Group to oversee the following sub-groups:

- Health – Looking at things such as mange – predominately academics / vets and a land holder
- Communication – looking at how to present research outcomes and other items to various stakeholders
- Research – to coordinate what research projects are required and access funding / resources and provide research outcomes to other parties.
- Management – Aimed at making the permit system work effectively and what management aspects are required which can feed back into the other sub-groups.
- Work with Community – Community engagement such as fact sheets / flyers / community events etc. Wider step to the communication sub-group.

The State Reference Group could consist of – 2 DEW policy, 3 regional DEW and 3 land holders from each major area, 2 researchers, 1 vet, 1 conservation council, 2 conservation group reps, 1 Livestock SA.