



Your strong and independent voice for livestock producers

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2 November 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
(Email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Committee Secretary,

Impact of feral deer, pigs and goats in Australia

Livestock SA welcomes the Inquiry into the impact of feral deer, pigs and goats in Australia.

Livestock SA is the peak body for sheep, beef cattle and goat producers in South Australia, with approximately 3,500 members. Most of these producers have had to deal with, and many continue to battle, one or more species of invasive animals. Pest animal control is a significant issue for Livestock SA members, with results from our recent 2018 annual survey highlighting it was a “major issue” for 35% of producers. While this includes feral deer, pigs and goats, other invasive animal species of major concern to livestock producers in South Australia include wild dogs and kangaroos. There are also other species of concern including rabbits, foxes, crows, feral cats, wombats, wallabies, possums, koalas and Cape Barren geese.

While this Senate Inquiry is highlighting feral deer, pigs and goats, all invasive animals need to be considered. Too often there is a silo mentality with each pest species considered separately. Livestock SA believes that there needs to be an overall total package with a coordinated plan. The ultimate aim must be eradication of feral pests. For native animals, effective management should ensure that there is a sustainable population and not an overabundance, which can have a detrimental effect particularly on the environment and livestock production systems.

In many instances, Federal and State Governments abrogate their responsibility, leaving it solely to regional and local natural resource management bodies and landowners who have limited funds and ability to control these invasive animals

A co-ordinated effort remains the key to effective pest animal control across Australia along with appropriate implementation and enforcement regimes underpinned by adequate resourcing. Control measures must equally be implemented on public lands. It is critical that all Governments support state-wide priorities and co-ordination, to bolster the investments made at the regional level.

For many invasive animals, there are well-founded prescribed plans, but these are not enforced and policed with adequate penalties for those not abiding by the strategies in place.

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.

Whilst the establishment of the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions is a good first step, it needs more promotion, adequate funding and support if it is to become an effective body.

Feral deer

In South Australia, the current level of control has not been effective at containing the spread or reducing the number of feral deer. Much of the blame must rest on the deer industry and there needs to be more emphasis on the fencing standards required to stop farmed deer from escaping. More policing of standards is also required. Between 1986 and 2016, there has only been one prosecution for the illegal release of deer.

In addition, it is noted with concern that many farmed deer are not tagged. Not only does this mean that these deer cannot be counted as escapees, but it raises serious biosecurity concerns for the livestock industry at a time when more stringent requirements are being understandably imposed. Livestock SA recommends that there be mandatory tagging of farmed deer.

While it is accepted that landholders are responsible for destroying feral deer on their land, this is not always possible when these deer move on and off the property.

In many cases escapees from private landholders can add to or be the cause of wild populations. This often means it 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 better compliance on the control and fencing of farmed deer and improved coordination of cull programs.

Federal funding has been used to fund deer culling in the South-East of South Australia, and it is essential that this funding continues to ensure the control efforts to date are not wasted.

Livestock SA welcomes the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions project that has brought together five state and territory governments (including South Australia), three local councils, three universities, and three private environmental groups, to form Australia's largest deer management research collaboration. Worth a combined investment of \$8.7 million, including \$3.2 million of direct funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, the collaboration will work on four innovative projects to develop best practice management feral deer toolkits and to better understand the role of feral deer in the transmission of disease to livestock, including Foot and Mouth Disease.

Feral pigs

Feral pigs also remain a concern, with their indiscriminate appearance across many regions in South Australia. It is concerning 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, increase grazing pressure and pose disease risks.

Fortunately, wild pigs are not currently a major issue for most parts of South Australia. However, there needs to be a well-funded, coordinated program to ensure that there is not an increase in numbers of feral pigs in this State that would threaten both agriculture and the environment. As one of Livestock SA's Board members, Gillian Fennell, has commented:

"We cannot afford to underestimate the capacity of feral pigs to destroy the environment, spread disease and ruin infrastructure. Having had first-hand experience of this foul creature in North West and Far North Queensland, they are very aggressive and will take lambs, ruin crops and water points and pose a genuine threat to pets and human safety. They will aid in the spread of parasites, weeds and disease and cannot be allowed to expand their range in South Australia. Any and all methods must be employed in their control and it must be a priority of any NRM group, government, landholders, farmers and environmental agencies to assist wherever possible."

It is concerning that there have been no prosecutions for release of pigs in South Australia since 1986. There are anecdotal reports about the release of pigs in some parts of the State, such as near the quarantine station on the Barrier Highway at Oodla Wirra. Although the sighting and destroying of these pigs is sporadic in this region, another feral pig was recently shot between Wilmington and Quorn, demonstrating a potentially emerging problem.

Kangaroo Island is the largest island in the world to have successfully eradicated feral goats and the only island to have eradicated feral deer. The Kangaroo Island local NRM Board has revitalised the drive to eradicate feral cats is now working towards the long-term goal of containing feral pigs.

One area of concern in South Australia is the Lake Eyre Basin. Following consultation with land managers along the Diamantina Warburton and Cooper Creek systems, indications are that feral pig numbers are reasonably low in this region. However, over a number of wet seasons, feral pigs can be triggered to reproduce very quickly, undermining previous control programs. Given the current low numbers of feral pigs in South Australia, landholders are attempting to keep feral pig numbers from escalating to a point that causes wide spread damage, as has occurred in other parts of Australia.

Feral goats

In South Australia, feral goat control remains an ongoing concern for pastoral producers. The strategic review and consideration of this resource remains ongoing.

Livestock SA understands that there is 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 establishment of such depots was 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 apart from this one survey.

The Australian goatmeat industry has experienced strong growth over the past 20 years with over 1.5 million goats processed annually. This growth has been largely supported by the sale of goats sourced from the rangelands which accounts for more than 90% of production. To support further growth in the rangeland goat industry, MLA has released a new online tool, *Going into Goats: A practical guide to producing goats in the rangelands*. Unfortunately the current policy in South Australia means this tool is of limited value in this South Australia.

Despite this restriction, South Australia exports about 15% of all goat meat exports and 32% of all live goat exports from Australia.

In other States, to ensure the continued development of a viable rangeland goat industry, producers have moved from opportunistic harvesting operations to increasingly managed production systems. Improvements in the management of rangeland goats have led to increased returns for producers through increased supply and improvements in quality, carcase weights and consistency. This is not allowed in South Australia.

In making this submission, Livestock SA would also like to endorse the submission of the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CISS) which is one of the world's largest pest animal RD&E collaborations. Livestock SA supports all recommendations made by CISS, particularly as they relate to collaboration and coordination and to management actions taking a nil-tenure approach.

Livestock SA would welcome the opportunity to provide further detail to the committee should it be required. Please contact our CEO, Andrew Curtis through any of the methods listed on page one of this submission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Keynes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "K".

Joe Keynes
President