

**Pest Animal Management Review**  
**Natural Resources Commission**

In reply to the draft report of March 2016 and the meeting in Deniliquin last Wednesday, I submit the following comments and suggestions.

Firstly, I wish to endorse the general direction the report advocates. Overall the proposed recommendations are straight forward, practical and a significant step in the right direction to help arrest the decline in biodiversity and help ensure agricultural viability.

My wife and I are retired farmers. [REDACTED]

Currently we have to deal with rabbits, foxes, cats and deer and potentially European carp in the future. There is also the ever present threat of pigs from the adjoining forest, particularly if a run of wet seasons occurs.

I was particularly pleased to see the proposed inclusion of deer and cats as pest animals.

Rabbits - Rabbits occur on our property, particularly the sand hill areas and also invade from adjoining properties including the Werai forest. We use warren fumigation and destruction, together with shooting as control measures, however these would be a monumental and financially draining task without the frequent outbreaks of R.H.D. Poisoning is not an option because of the risk to non-target native species.

Ongoing research into rabbit bio-control methods is absolutely essential.

Foxes - We bait twice yearly with a marked reduction in the fox population. None of our neighbours bait for foxes so we are constantly reinfested with these animals. N.P.W.S regularly bait in the Werai forest but not in the areas adjoining our property. This lack of adjacent baiting is of great concern to us. Shooting of foxes occurs when opportunity presents.

Cats - Our cat numbers do not appear to be high and they are a difficult animal to control. We use traps when a cat is indicated. Shooting, assisted by our hunting dog locating and treeing cats is also used when the opportunity occurs. Future control methods such as poisoning are of great interest to us.

I strongly support all the Commission's recommendations made in Chapter 6.3 "Reducing the risks from cats".

Deer - Deer, in our case Red Deer are a problem both for the recognised adverse environmental effects caused by their grazing and browsing as well as destruction of our sand hill revegetation trees by the stag with his antlers during the annual breeding season. These animals primarily do not live on our property but exist in significant numbers in the Werai forest. N.P.W.S does some control with helicopter shooting in the Werai.

I support the Commission's recommendations 16(1, 11) to manage deer as a pest animal.

European Carp - A large part of our landscape restoration includes the future planned opening of blocked flood-ways and the restoration of shallow ephemeral wetlands. Carp have a devastating effect in these types of wetlands and I view the forecast release of the cyprinid herpesvirus as being of great importance to the Murray Darling Basin and beyond for both financial and environmental reasons.

I strongly support the Commissions' recommendations in Box 7.8 "Managing carp through biological control" and their recommendations 19(1-IV) "Prioritise the implementations of biocontrol options for carp."

Chapter 7.4 - Recreational hunting as a management tool.

I support the recommendations made in this section 22(1) and 23(1,11) and endorse the comments made in Box 7.0.

With regard to the often touted bounty system, there may be a case for a one off bounty to be placed on a particular animal or group of animals that have avoided all other control measures, however if recreational hunters are included as recommended in 22(1) they are more likely to have an outlook slanted to biodiversity enhancement rather than just a pure hunting experience. It may be more appropriate for an award (Certificate of significant achievement in biodiversity enhancement) to be bestowed on a hunter or group of hunters when they play a significant role in a localised pest animal control program.

Similarly when private landowners, ranging from 2 H.A. residential blocks to large scale commercial farms, achieve significant achievement in pest animal control for agricultural and biodiversity benefits they should receive some form of public recognition.

As an example, several years ago the Victorian Government ran a program called "Rabbit Free." It involved landowners in getting their rabbits to a very low level which was then publicly acknowledged. We participated in this program and managed to completely rid our 130 H.A. dairy farm of rabbits, an achievement of which we were quite proud. Our task was made easier by one neighbour who controlled their rabbits and more difficult by another (across a creek) who did nothing to control their rabbit infestation. It is noteworthy the last two rabbits were taken out by a recreational hunter.

We own a nature covenanted property in Victoria and have entered into an ongoing arrangement with North Central C.M.A., Victorian Environmental Water Holder and G.M. Water to restore and maintain the properties wetland complex. Because of this it is attractive to feral pigs that exist along the lower Loddon River. We use the services of two recreational hunters to control pigs, foxes and cats. One hunter uses well trained and managed pig dogs fitted with radio tracking collars. They are highly effective and the only way of catching the pigs in thick brush. Immediately they are caught the pigs are despatched. The other hunter uses spotlighting and daytime fox decoy calling. He will also shoot any pigs caught in the spotlight. Although nowhere near as effective as a poisoning campaign he does make a considerable reduction in the fox population.

Because of the efforts of these hunters we currently are free of pigs on our property.

I believe the N.S.W. Government should resist any move to ban the use of pig hunting dogs.

While there is room for much improvement in some pig hunter's behaviour, collectively they should be brought into pest control planning by regional co-ordinators. This should help educate them and promote responsible hunting behaviour as occurs within groups such as occurs with S.S.A.A.

I would suggest heavy penalties for transporting live feral pigs (for release elsewhere) including the banning of ownership and use of pigdogs for many years.

The use of dogs in biodiversity management is in its early days but is likely to become a very useful tool in the future. Some of their uses could include locating turtle nests and hard to find nocturnal native animals for monitoring and assessment purposes. Another use could be the protection of breeding populations of threatened species by Maremma guard dogs.

Using highly trained dogs under the supervision of competent and certified handlers in these types of work situations would enhance biodiversity restoration and agricultural activities. It would also likely involve another sector of the community in pest animal control and pest animal damage mitigation, dog owners who are not necessarily hunters.

I believe legislation regarding dogs in public land areas and interaction with native wildlife across all land tenures needs reviewing and amending to accommodate this very useful emerging management practice.

The use of highly trained pig hunting dogs under the control of competent certified handlers to assist (particularly after trapping and helicopter shooting campaigns) in feral pig control in public lands should also be considered in a legislative review.

I recognise that pig hunters and their dogs do not necessarily have a good image in the eyes of some sections of the community but I believe they could be an asset if brought into the fold rather than excluded from Shared Problems -Shared Solutions.

Targeted funding Item 30 Page 12.

1. I agree with the minimum rateable area being reduced to 2H.A.
2. 'Provide ongoing funding for regional co-ordinators'

Regional co-ordinators and their ongoing funding is the major key to Shared Problems – Shared Solutions.

Without adequate ongoing funding for this purpose little more than what happens now will be achieved.

It should be noted that existing pest control officers within L.L.S. are fully committed and while some of them may be suitable to take on the role of regional co-ordinator, they cannot do this on top of their existing jobs.

Funding for regional co-ordinators must be additional money, not cost shifting from other programs and services.

To deliver the services suggested for provision by professional co-ordinators, refer Table 5.4 page 62, they must be skilled and/or knowledgeable in many disciplines such as:

- Communication skills across the varying attitudes and knowledge base of the general community.
- Agricultural.
- Natural environment.
- Pest animal.
- Legislation and the preparedness to use it when needed.
- Project planning and assessment.

Co-ordinators must be highly skilled people and be offered secure ongoing employment. The knowledge base and community links gained by long term employment in the one area is invaluable for pest management.

As well as funding for regional co-ordinators there will be a need for additional staff within L.L.S. as support for the programs run by the regional co-ordinator i.e. more fox bait preparation etc.

It is generally accepted that one of the factors in the decline in turtle numbers is caused by fox predation on turtle nests. Research in Victoria indicates that saturation baiting of priority turtle nesting areas over the nesting period is the most promising control method. If this is the case and it becomes a biodiversity management practice, it is an example of where more labour would be needed to prepare, lay and monitor baits.

In the case of Werai forest (which contains significant habitat suitable for turtles) a good start would be to have all land, both private and public in a large surrounding area adequately fox baited during the twice yearly L.L.S. baiting programs.

It is likely public private partnerships will play a significant part in the future protection of biodiversity as they do now for agricultural benefits. These public/private partnerships must be funded and backed by well-resourced regional co-ordination of pest animal control measures.

These partnerships are likely to be instigated by farmers and other land owners such as tree change retirees, urban people who desire to own a recreational block in the country, nature conservation groups, business and industry groups etc.

I support the recommendations to bring both public and private land owners and managers under the same legislative umbrella with regard to pest animal control. It is essential that regional co-ordinators can hold all landowners and managers to account on the same playing field.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission.

Ken Hooper