

# NSW Pest Animals report

## Summary

RFA appreciates the opportunity to comment on reports such as these. RFA is the only not-for-profit national entity that raises funds for research into Australia's worst vertebrate pest and while it is relatively small as an organisation, it takes its role and responsibilities seriously. We note this report is very lengthy and as a voluntary group, we have not studied every page closely. Our response is concentrated on the executive summary and recommendations, so missing of some detail in the body of the report may be a consequence. As a general comment and while it is a complex subject, long reports do not necessarily work well and governments would be better served with a more concise approach, there by making it easier to attract reasoned comment.

## Overall comments

1. It is pleasing to note the report has wild rabbits as the first of the list of vertebrate pests and indicates an annual cost in NSW of \$170m, although it is surprising that wild rabbits and their impacts are not given more attention in the body of the report. There is some concern about what some have described as 'rabbit amnesia'; the problem has been around for over 100 years and still is a problem because of the nature of the pest. Rabbits in the wetter parts and coastal areas of Australia suitable for rabbit habitat remain as a significant problem although it is hoped that RHDV K5 will reduce this impact. Continued research and application of proven control techniques remain important. These need to be better understood by landholders, both of private and public lands.
2. The biodiversity loss and cost to the community is acknowledged, but not quantified. This is a problem and the IACRC has tried to deal with this by quantifying the number of species threatened. This risk to biodiversity is also part of the TAP produced by the Commonwealth Environment Department.
3. The report notes that positive progress has been made, but there is still a lot to be done. While this may be true for invasive species at large, continuing the search across the world for 'the next biocontrol' for rabbits remains a priority. We did not see that this was given much coverage if any in the report. Reliance on RHDV K5 and other related caliciviruses is in RFA's opinion, unlikely to resolve Australia's, let alone NSW's rabbit problem.
4. The report rightly refers to sustaining landholder support. We have partly commented on this importance and in our view, more thought and commitment is required through use of suitable governance arrangements and related allocation of responsibility between the public and private sectors. See later comments about the role of the states and the commonwealth.
5. Related to no.4 is the matter of community empowerment. Governments are less inclined to provide financial support as once they did, but their role in producing good policy with targeted support where a community is committed to drive a responsible approach to pest animal management is an essential part of achieving an effective result.
6. In our view, governments at least 2 levels have a real role in targeted investment in research. The wild rabbit problem is complex and hoping it

will go away is not the answer. If governments are prepared to invest, it makes it much easier for the relevant industry group, such as R&D corporations, universities and entities such as RFA to contribute. With the future of the IACRC being unclear and with new proposals not necessarily attractive to such other research funding groups, this increases the importance. We are keen to ensure the commonwealth continues to be involved in this area, but note that it has to work well for intra-jurisdictional entities in particular to ensure their continuing involvement that makes a difference.

### **Recommendations**

We provide the following comments on the recommendations:

- a) The report refers to a NSW Biosecurity Advisory Committee. While we are not necessarily opposed to this governance concept, we wonder if it will be able to follow through with its recommendations, or will be subject to the whims of its minister? For example, will the relevant minister be obliged to take its advice seriously? We have mentioned before that effective governance that reduces risk of bypassing what has been recommended, seems critical to us.
- b) The recommendations do not seem to mention or specify the nature of the relationship between local government and the respective LLSs. We suggest this be made quite clear, as the role of local government in pest animal management can be most valuable in gaining more community empowerment and accountability.
- c) The report seems not to give enough attention and commitment to working with other jurisdictions, whether commonwealth, state or territory. We and all others know that pest animals are not confined to administrative arrangements, so this is key factor.
- d) The recommendations make particular comment about cats, deer, carp, horses and other pest animals. We wonder why rabbits do not specifically gain a mention in this part of the executive summary and also wonder if we missed it. If they do not get a mention, including the body of the report, we believe they certainly should.

These are the key points RFA wishes to make at this stage and we wish to be kept informed. What NSW as a large state does can influence what other jurisdictions might do and we commend NSW for producing the report and providing the opportunity for comment.

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