

A submission on behalf of

# The Australian Pig Doggers and Hunters Association Inc



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To the NSW Natural Resources Commission

*Statewide Review of Pest Animal Management*

## What is the APDHA and who does it represent?

The APDHA is a national body representing pig hunters who use dogs, firearms, bows and traps to hunt and manage feral pigs.

We incorporated in 2005 and have members in every Australian State and Territory with activities overseen by a committee which deals with local, State and Federal Governments, landholders and the police on matters including hunting access, pest control and hunting law.

Our membership is now more than 2000 and growing.

## Why is the APDHA making this submission?

The APDHA sees part of its role as liaison between the pig hunting community and those whose job it is to administer pest management and hunting law. This submission is not about looking for opportunities for members to hunt. Our members already have access to millions of hectares nationwide (public and private). Our objective with this submission is to start a conversation on a more effective way to carry out pest control operations by tapping into the knowledge of people who study pest animals day in, day out.

## What is going right and what is going wrong in pest control?

The fact that we have the opportunity to discuss this issue in a submission as a follow up to our representation to the commission in Sydney is indicative to us of a significant step forward in the planning and management of pest control in NSW.

Rightly or wrongly, there has been a perception that previous attempts at pest management have been potentially locally effective but lacking in a genuine commitment to carry on with the task.

The criticism we have heard included a lack of departmental co-ordination, a lack of money and the lack of a genuine understanding of the target animal.

Departmental co-ordination appears to be on the table and under review. We can't help with that. Where we can help is with money, (or more accurately value for money) and knowledge.

## Knowledge is (planning) power...

The money spent on pest control in NSW is significant but outside government departments the issue is never about how much money is spent but how effective it is. Effectiveness means different things to different people of course and can come down to the measurement parameters each party sets. The landholder might measure a rabbit control program on changes in available pasture volume. The relevant authority might measure effectiveness in baits laid or landholders involved. The danger is that departmental effectiveness might have nothing to do with pests controlled and everything to do with process.

What we would hope to offer is assistance in more effective planning from the outset so the money used in pest control, particularly in relation to feral pigs, has the greatest chance of reaching the maximum number of animals rather than ticking the maximum number of boxes.

How that money is spent and when, should have as its governing determinant (after the premise that the objective is to reduce the impact of a pest animal or animals) the knowledge of how and when to do the job.

We know the public service has many genuinely competent people working on these issues but our question is why limit the process to only those people? Is there nothing that can be achieved by the ongoing input of people with decades of daily experience in feral pig behaviour, habits, movement and psychology? Can the knowledge of people who are passionate about studying feral pig behaviour in relation to the seasons, the location, the time of day and even the phase of the moon be used to more effectively target programs?

We are happy to argue for the on ground involvement of hunters at the back end of programs and between programs but we seek to take a bigger picture view than that of the issue. For the time being let's set aside our members physically removing pigs from the environment. Let's look at our members being part of localised planning before a dollar is spent.

What we would suggest is the development of a communication protocol using hunter knowledge of target animals generally and within a given area specifically to help set up programs on an annual and broadscale basis.

For instance, in the New England and North West Slopes and Plains, the primary breeding time for feral pigs is in Autumn with sows in season about the second week in May. At this time boars and sows tend to mob up and become far less cautious. Food demands for sows also grow exponentially because of initially increased social activity and movement and then, the demands of carrying a litter and feeding it after birth.

A second period like this occurs in September and a third, in really good seasons occurs in January.

In these periods pig behaviour changes and offers the best chance to trap, bait, shoot or otherwise remove pigs from the landscape.

These basic behaviours are repeated throughout the State but the timing can vary from area to area.

Likewise the harvesting of crops, the availability of lucerne and oats etc during cold weather, chick pea planting all have the potential to concentrate otherwise dispersed pigs into a manageable area.

In the west in summer, pigs haunt exposed water points but pigs in rough hill country to the east will not because of the abundance of shade and small rocks holes, particularly in the granite country.

There is much more but we hope we've made the point. Hunters and our members in particular gather this information every day, every week and every year. They make mental and physical notes, they set up game cameras to study particular animals or places. They share information with others...

At the moment, there appears no way for government departments to access this information. Imagine a system in which a co-ordinating team involving government and hunter representatives talked about pest animal control before the event, took into account hunter knowledge as well as the accepted wisdom of departments and laid out state and regional plans on the basis of animal behaviour timetables rather than funding models, staff holidays and delays in interdepartmental communications.

Further, imagine that system broken down to regional level to account for variations in weather, agricultural activity and known animal behaviour.

The Local Land Services structure would appear to be the best to deliver the concept on a regional basis but maybe there is room for an over arching management team to clear away obstacles at a government and departmental level.

We see it, once established, being driven by the regions rather than from decrees made from on high. The people closest to the issues are the most likely to know what and when to do whatever needs doing. The management committee's role would be to keep the process moving, remove blockages and co-ordinate between regions.

This is not to suggest hunter involvement will provide the magic bullet in pest animal control but it seems ludicrous to us that the cumulative thousands of years of hunter experience in NSW is not sought out to maximise the potential for efficient, effective action.

## Getting started

In our view, the first step is to look, as you are now, at the issue from well above.

- There is a need for a management committee and a single body to co-ordinate on ground action..
- The management committee should report to the Minister and include government agency, NSW Farmers and hunter representatives.
- The LLS to us is the logical body to co-ordinate and/or carry out the work. The LLS needs to be able to access hunters with localised knowledge of target animals as well as build further liaison with land owners and managers to add to its established networks.
- The management committee needs to have the authority to require that hunter/land manager liaison (linking it to funding for example).
- Parameters for success need to be simplified. How many animals were removed? Or have land managers seen a reduction in pest animal impact?
- Feedback from all involved needs to be sought and acted upon.

We see the APDHA as having a lot to offer in relation to feral pig control planning. We also believe we have the background to offer broader management expertise. As such we are happy to offer any assistance that might be deemed useful, including providing the people in each region to give an insight into localised feral pig behaviour.

## A final word on hunting and pest control

In this submission we have focussed on hunter contribution to planning. Please don't see this as suggesting hunters have no other role in pest control. The APDHA has focussed on the planning needs of pest control because that is the obvious place to start. The planning needs to change for the results to improve (both in terms of animals removed and value for dollars spent).

Co-ordinated hunters with a clear brief can achieve a great deal. For example the APDHA is currently involved in hunting trials on Northern Territory National Parks estate. It is early in the program but already APDHA managed hunting has removed more big breeding pigs from the landscape in six weeks than were removed by the previous project in the past three years. The average size of pigs removed has been 80.2kgs live weight with an average of one pig for each 6.7 hours in the field...all at no cost to the government. Indeed, Rangers involved told our representatives to expect nothing because of the terrain and elusiveness of the pigs in the more than 16,000ha Black Jungle trial site.

The success of this trial has prompted agreement to expand the trial to a further five reserves under the same controlled conditions, including the presence of a senior APDHA representative on all hunts under permit and the use of dogs only in areas outside visitor frequented areas.

A Northern Territory Government contact can be supplied if more information is required.

The APDHA has also had a long and successful relationship with public land hunting in NSW under the guidance of the Game Council of NSW and later the Department of Primary Industries Game Unit.

We believe we have a role to play in planning but we also have a significant role to play at the coal face of feral pig removal.

