

Submission to the State-wide Review of NSW Pest Animal Management Issues Paper

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Opening

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) is the peak body for councils in NSW. It represents all the 152 NSW general-purpose councils, the 12 special-purpose county councils and the NSW Aboriginal Land Council.

In essence LGNSW is the 'sword and shield' of the NSW Local Government sector. LGNSW is a credible, professional organisation representing NSW councils and facilitating the development of an effective community-based system of Local Government in NSW. LGNSW represents the views of councils to NSW and Australian Governments; provides industrial relations and specialist services to councils; and promotes NSW councils to the community.

LGNSW welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Issues Paper on the State-wide review of NSW pest animal management* prepared by the Natural Resources Commission (NRC).

Background

General

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) welcomes the NRC's review as an opportunity to improve the way pest animals are managed in NSW.

LGNSW's members have a primary responsibility to control vertebrate pests affecting land under their control and management, in particular when an animal is declared a pest under the *Local Land Services Act 2013* or is threatening the viability of threatened species, populations or endangered ecological communities. Councils also have responsibilities under the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, which applies to cats, dogs and any other animals prescribed in the Regulation.

In addition to Council's responsibilities as a land manager, it has a broader responsibility to the community to minimise risks to public safety and loss of amenity caused by vertebrate pests in accordance with its obligations under the *Local Government Act 1993*. This 'duty of care' can extend to controlling risk of pest animals causing injury or damage on council-managed roads or parks.

For vertebrate pest matters affecting the community and on land outside of a council's direct control, councils do not have a regulatory role but have in many cases worked to coordinate or otherwise support the work of key agencies and landholders in the area in addressing pest animals.

Response

Roles and responsibilities

There is a wide range of legislation that governs the management of pest animals, both in terms of identifying which species require control and also the method or approach to their control. Relevant NSW and Commonwealth legislation includes:

- *Local Land Services Act 2013*
- *Local Government Act 1993*
- *Companion Animals Act 1998*

- *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*
- *Fisheries Management Act 1994*
- *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*
- *Pesticides Act 1999*
- *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)*
- *Biosecurity Act 2015 (once commenced)*

The commencement of the Biosecurity Act will simplify the framework to an extent, however there remains a need for greater clarity around roles and responsibilities.

LGNSW members have a role in managing pest animal species on land which they manage, as outlined above. However in some areas councils have also taken on the role of facilitating pest animal control on private properties or mixed tenures in order to achieve more robust outcomes. This is purely in recognition of the fact that pest animals move, and without a coordinated approach across land tenures in an area, the effectiveness of control measures is reduced.

To date councils generally consider there has been a lack of formal coordination at local / regional level, particularly with no clear leader assigned. The *Local Land Services Act 2013* (LLS Act) assigns LLS the function of administering, delivering or funding *programs and advisory services* associated with biosecurity (amongst other things). Part 10 of that Act provides for the control of pests on public and private land, largely through the making of pest control orders and their enforcement by authorised officers (appointed by the LLS or Minister). However pest control orders currently only apply to a proportion of (i.e. declared) pest animal species. It is unclear who is responsible for regulation, coordinating actions and providing advice and guidance for the remainder of pest species.

As noted earlier, the Biosecurity Act (once commenced) will set a general biosecurity duty that will confirm the responsibilities of land managers. The new Act and Regulation should also clarify regulatory responsibilities, and it will be critical that the arrangements are communicated to stakeholders and the broader community. Some councils have noted that greater regional coordination of on-ground activity is needed for both declared and non-declared pest animal species.

The Vertebrate Pest Control Manual (DPI, 2014) is a useful guide to outline regulatory requirements in majority of Acts. However it is mainly aimed at LLS officers and officers dealing with control of declared species in particular. Access to a best practice manual or similar for a wider range of land managers would be beneficial to clarify roles and responsibilities, provide information on approved (or tried and tested) methods, and make it simpler for all land managers to do their bit.

The DPI website provides profiles and control information on animals subject to pest control orders and a few other select pest animals¹, however this could be expanded upon to include deer, cats and aquatic species, for example. Raising awareness of the existing web resources (including the existing manual) amongst councils and other land managers would also be beneficial, as many are not aware these resources are available. These resources could be updated and circulated as part of the Biosecurity Act implementation.

¹ <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/pests-weeds/vertebrate-pests/pest-animals-in-nsw>

Priority pest species

Local Government supports the hierarchy of 'prevent, eradicate, contain and protect' outlined in the NSW Invasive Species Plan. This provides a logical approach to prioritising where effort and resources are best expended. The NRC's issues paper noted that the stakeholder workshop identified additional criteria including triple bottom line impacts, feasibility of control, and future risks. These are all useful criteria.

An additional criterion for prioritising pest animals could include species that have the potential to spread disease to humans. For example, deer have the capacity to spread tuberculosis and Q fever.

We support the NRC's statement that evidence is essential for supporting prioritisation decisions. However when resources are stretched, it becomes a question of how much to invest in monitoring and data collection versus on-ground controls. Monitoring should be fit-for-purpose both in terms of the accuracy of detection, and also the spatial resolution. For example, detection of new/emerging pests in a region should focus on high-risk pathways, preferred habitats or in areas surrounding known populations. The focus for monitoring would be on early detection and therefore may need to be at a finer scale, whereas for control of known populations of a widespread pest, a coarser scale monitoring of population trend may be sufficient.

Landscape approach

As outlined earlier in this submission, coordination of pest animal management is usually most effective by species within a local to regional area. However this does vary with species and their range. The need for improved coordination of planning and on-ground works is a critical success factor.

With regard to the question of whether pest animal and pest plant management should be integrated, some councils already combine these two roles. While there are synergies between weeds and pest management, the combination of these roles within councils is more likely a result of limited resourcing. As such, care is needed to ensure that moves to more formally combine these roles at local or regional level do not further reduce the overall resources available.

Emerging Issues

An emerging issue that has been highlighted is that of domesticated or captive animals being released in the landscape. For example, recreational hunters may take domesticated dogs out into rural areas when pig hunting but if the dog gets lost or doesn't return in time then it may be left, becoming part of the wild population. Increased community awareness of the requirements for using hunting dogs and enforcement of those requirements is needed to ensure that measures to control feral populations of one species don't inadvertently end up contributing to another feral population.

Similarly, where pest animals are kept in captivity but fences are not maintained, escapees can quickly breed in the wild. The LLS Act includes requirements for keeping declared pests in captivity, however there are a number of species that are not declared and that have high potential for spread in this manner e.g. deer.

Adequate resourcing

Funding for pest animal management is often difficult to access as there are few remaining avenues at NSW or federal level. While pest animal management is a land manager's

responsibility, resources devoted to this task must be considered within the context of all other responsibilities. A common call among councils is the need for secure, longer-term funding for on-ground activities to prevent, eradicate and control pest animals. Even relatively small amounts (\$20,000 or less) can make a significant difference in outcomes that can be achieved.

In addition, councils are sometimes going beyond the requirement to manage pests on land they control and undertaking landholder coordination or works in their local government area. Funding to support this task, or a clearer designation of this role (e.g. to LLS or other), is required. Local Government generally considers that there are too few staff in LLS to undertake compliance and enforcement work, or to provide guidance or coordination support to land managers. It is vital that these roles are adequately resourced if we are to make inroads in managing pest animals.

Knowledge building

It is important to monitor and understand where pests animals are, the scale of the problem and to develop/test control approaches. We support investment in building this knowledge and in applied research that has practical application.

We note that projects funded through state or federal grants are usually required to undertake monitoring, which can use up to 30 percent of the budget, but there is little emphasis put on coordinating monitoring results and making that information accessible for others to draw on. We would encourage greater coordination of information and data on the management of pest animals.

Education and awareness of pest animal management also needs to be improved, so that land owners/managers understand their responsibilities. This may be a matter that, in general terms, can be addressed during implementation of the biosecurity legislation. LGNSW also understands that a vertebrate pest management course is currently available, however priority for the few places is given to LLS staff. It would be very useful for other land managers to have more access to this course to increase their knowledge and capacity.

Conclusion

LGNSW welcomes the review of pest animal management arrangements, and the potential it provides to improve its coordination and management.

LGNSW supports greater clarity being provided on roles and responsibilities in pest animal management, particularly in relation to coordination, compliance and enforcement. Improved coordination at landscape-scale (local to regional, depending on the pest animal) is essential to achieving the goals outlined in the NSW Invasive Species Plan.

Greater support for land managers through provision of guidance and access to information such as monitoring results and control techniques is paramount, as is secure, long-term funding to undertake on-ground works.

LGNSW appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the NRC's issues paper and looks forward to further contributing to the review in due course.