



Ryde - Hunter's Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society

Member of Nature Conservation Council of N.S.W.

**P.O. Box 2127
Boronia Park 2111**

Natural Resources Commission
25 November 2015.

RE: Statewide Review of Pest Animals Management Issues Paper

Dear Sir/Madam,

We write to express concern at the inaction by levels of government towards control of pest species. We are a local conservation group established in 1966 with a close association with the Field of Mars Reserve and Wildlife Refuge. Successful community opposition to a proposed land fill in the reserve in the mid 1960s has seen the mostly Crown Reserve dedicated for flora and fauna protection and gazetted as a Wildlife Refuge. Our members were instrumental in the establishment of the Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre visited by over 15,000 students each year.

We feel strongly that greater funding is required to identify all pests early, including pathogens, and prevention action to stop their entry into Australia. This requires improved taxonomic capacity within the CSIRO and universities, early detection and well-resourced prevention strategies. There is a need for consistency between State and Commonwealth legislation. Any control programs initiated should be monitored and evaluated for the success or otherwise of the program.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS RE URBAN FOX CONTROL:

In the mid 1990s, our Society initiated the early stages of what developed into the very successful Northern Sydney Fox Control program. It has been disappointing to see it unravel over the past five years or so and we wish to make a series of dot points as way of reflection on this program:

- The lead-in community development time by our Society was about two years for this program to be initiated in Northern Sydney;
- Its beginnings were in the Field of Mars Reserve, a Wildlife Refuge where fauna was under regular predation by the urban fox;
- Residents were very concerned but powerless - meetings held with representatives from our Society, the City of Ryde's natural areas manager and the then RLPB ranger produced no solutions as 1080 baiting was not permitted in urban areas and rangers were reluctant to undertake shooting and trapping control as it was expensive and often ineffective;
- Nearby Council natural area managers also were concerned at fox predation but unable to take action - it was also clear that co-ordinated action was required but there was no over-arching administrative mechanism to facilitate a control program;

- Undeterred, members of our Society continued to lobby and some seed funding was found within NPWS for a temporary Pest Species Officer. The skills of this person were critical and this appointment was significant as the person was a new, enthusiastic, intelligent ranger with excellent understanding of the need for further community development if this program was to get off the ground;
- Our Society then sought funding from the local catchment management authority for printing costs of a community information brochure explaining the threats posed by the urban fox and actions they could take to minimise these threats. This brochure was prepared by our Society and the NPWS Pest Officer and distributed widely;
- Our Society then sought funding for a community forum to explore alternative options to baiting in urban areas which was recognised as a major hurdle to overcome;
- A successful forum was held which brought together a range of land managers and concerned members of community - the results of this suggested that a controlled 1080 baiting program provided the best option;
- A series of community forums were held which involved the broader community, animal rights advocates and concerned members of the community;
- Whilst all of the above was happening the Society commenced the Urban Feral Animal Action Group which met at the Field of Mars Visitors Centre. This initially involved the NPWS Pest Officer ranger and land manager staff from neighbouring Council areas;
- UFAAG provided a forum for discussion (and a sharing of frustration) in how to commence an effective urban fox control program across Northern Sydney;
- At all times the mobility and opportunistic nature of the urban fox was recognised by the group - by this stage urban foxes were regularly seen in local schools, attacking pets such as guinea pigs in backyards, along suburban streets and of course attacking fauna in the Wildlife Refuge - the screams of night fauna under attack especially distressing for nearby residents to the reserve;
- The group continued to meet and became expanded to include land managers such as golf clubs;
- The catchment management authority continued to support UFAAG;
- The local animal rights groups gave verbal signoff for a controlled trial program to use 1080 baits under restricted licence;
- The necessary authority to permit the restricted use of 1080 baits in Northern Sydney gave sign off. Society members also presented to this group arguing that foxes posed not just a major predation threat to native fauna but a health and safety risk to pets and children;
- Only some areas in the City of Ryde were able to meet the conditions of the restricted licence eg in the Field of Mars Reserve with an area of 50 hectare only two stations were able to be installed;
- The program commenced with all land managers doing the necessary on ground notifications, pre and post bait monitoring and placements of standard advertisements in the local papers. It was strategically undertaken twice a year - when foxes were going into den and when the young ones were going out on their own;
- An attempt to get university interest in scientific monitoring of the program overall was unsuccessful but monitoring did occur in some more sensitive areas where threatened species were known to occur;
- After the initial program more land managers became involved but still guided by NPWS Pest Officer in a co-ordinating role. This ensured that there was consistent risk management and compliance with the restricted licence requirements;

- Many land managers used the opportunity of the “closed to dogs parks” to undertake rabbit control;
- The Society continued to promote options for improved use of 1080 baits such as tethered baits and single dose mechanism to reduce risks to non target species;
- The Society left all management of UFAAG to NPWS;
- The success of the control program was observed locally (anecdotally) with increased fauna sightings of species such as water dragons, ducks and even a swamp wallaby which was observed in the Field of Mars for the “first” time;
- Powerful Owl numbers have also increased within the Lane Cove Valley possibly an increase in ring tailed possums has contributed to this;
- During the last few years the program has not been administered regularly in the Field of Mars Reserve - it was actually ceased for two seasons. This was due to a staff change at City of Ryde and a reluctance by the new staff person to continue the baiting program;
- Additionally the position of NPWS Pest Species Officer for Northern Sydney had a change in duties and responsibilities. This seemed to relate to funding cuts to NPWS and/or changes in funding area priorities
- The screams of native fauna under attack at night and reports of foxes in nearby back yards now seems on the increase.

CONCLUSION:

We are sending this history through to highlight that urban fox control programs are possible and can be run relatively cheaply. Members of the community can assist in such programs but such programs rely on motivated staff in positions supported within budgets that identify the important role of pest control. There is an urgent need for an “oversight” authority - whether this is via a dedicated NPWS Pest Species Officer or dedicated staff within the new Local Land Services administration. This “oversight” role ensures risk is managed consistently and compliance in an urban setting with its specific set of risks. We note that Greater Sydney LLS has identified itself a lead agency in urban fox control in its recent Strategic Plan. Hopefully adequate funding from the State government will be allocated to this important activity.

Overall the urban fox control program in Northern Sydney suggests a good model for roll out across Sydney. It has demonstrated that in urban areas co-ordinated and integrated control programs across various land tenures, that simultaneously target the opportunistic and versatile urban fox, can work. Without such a strategic and regional approach it is likely that residents will continue to be distressed by fox attacks on their backyard pets. Much loved and threatened species such as Manly’s Little Penguins, where significant funding has been allocated of late to control fox attack, can also continue to delight Sydney residents and visitors.

We feel that wide area comprehensive 1080 baiting control programs (including shooting in some areas) occurring simultaneously across Sydney provide the best and cheapest option to control the wily fox. However, as demonstrated above despite the best community will by groups such as ours where there is a lack of political will and absence of lead agency these programs will collapse.

Yours sincerely,

Cathy Merchant,
President.