

TERMS OF REFERENCE

EVALUATION OF THE SUPPLEMENTARY PEST CONTROL TRIAL PROGRAM

Background

The NSW Government has decided to:

- implement a program of Supplementary Pest Control (SPC) in national parks and other reserves using volunteer shooters who will be regulated, scheduled and carefully managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS); the purpose of this program is to assist in controlling pest animals by complementing ongoing NPWS pest control programs;
- commence the program, initially as a trial, in 12 reserves;
- independently evaluate the trial before any further rollout of the program.

These Terms of Reference outline how this evaluation will be conducted.

Evaluation of the SPC trial

The Premier and the Minister for the Environment requests that the Natural Resources Commission (the Commission) evaluate the SPC trial program to assist the NSW Government in deciding whether, and how, to proceed with the proposed SPC program (beyond the trial period).

The Commission will independently evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the SPC trial program based on robust, evidence-based exploration of key issues. In developing its advice the Commission should consider issues such as (but not limited to):

- the effectiveness of the SPC trial program in contributing to the aims and objectives of existing NPWS pest control programs, including
 - evidence that relevant native species populations have been additionally protected by the SPC trial
 - evidence that impacts of pest animals on neighbouring landholders and on the environment have been reduced
 - evidence that the number of pest animals taken by volunteers contributes to the existing NPWS pest animal programs (giving consideration to relative timing of control activities)
 - evidence that good animal welfare standards have been maintained
 - evidence that the SPC trial has been successfully aligned with and integrated into existing NPWS pest control programs, including evidence of any impacts on NPWS park operations
 - evidence that the SPC trial has been conducted in a manner consistent with the program approved by Government, that appropriately manages risk, that complies with relevant legislation and aligns with Government priorities (such as the NSW Biosecurity Strategy and NSW2021).
- the efficiency of the SPC trial program, including
 - the costs and benefits of the trial to the NSW Government and to regional communities

- how the SPC trial program compares to alternative uses of the available resources that may achieve similar outcomes
- the social impacts of the SPC trial.

Any recommendations from the Commission should include potential improvements to the SPC program to enhance effectiveness and efficiency, if the program is to continue after the trial.

The Commission should also have regard to the following in undertaking the evaluation:

- any broader research carried out by the Department of Primary Industries on hunting as a pest control technique
- best practice in pest control programs and their evaluation in other jurisdictions.

The Commission should consult with relevant stakeholders in conducting their evaluation and in developing recommendations, including park neighbours, Aboriginal communities, Local Land Services, NPWS staff, volunteers and shooting organisations involved in the trial, other members of the hunting community, conservation and animal welfare groups, recreational users of parks and reserves, and tourism providers.

The Commission should also consult technical experts with pest management expertise and ecological, economic and social science skills including the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH), Department of Primary Industries and universities conducting relevant research.

The Commission should work closely with the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) in designing and conducting the evaluation.

Evaluation outcomes and recommendations rely heavily on the design of the trial, the availability of existing data (including baselines) and information on existing NPWS pest control programs, as well as any additional data that can be collected during the three year trial. OEH will be responsible for the collection and quality of data from existing NPWS pest control programs and from the SPC trial, as required by the evaluation.

For some elements of the evaluation, conclusive, scientifically reliable evidence at all sites may not be achievable within the timeframe of the trial (three years). In this instance the best available alternative sources of evidence will be sought.

The Commission is to provide:

- interim evaluation reports, including draft findings
- a final evaluation report, including outcomes of the evaluation and recommendations to Government, by 31 May 2017.

Amendments

Any changes to these Terms of Reference may be made by the Minister for Environment and the Premier and will be published on the website of the Office of Environment and Heritage and the Natural Resources Commission.