



7 November 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via Email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Cattle Council of Australia (Cattle Council) and Sheep Producers Australia (Sheep Producers) thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Environment and Communications Reference Committee inquiry into *The impact of feral deer, pigs and goats in Australia, and national priorities to prevent the problems worsening for the natural environment, community and farmers.*

As the peak industry organisations for sheep, lamb and grass-fed cattle producers, Cattle Council and Sheep Producers believe that feral pests including deer, pigs and goats threaten our animals' health and productivity, our markets and the quality and integrity of our products.

Cattle Council and Sheep Producers support the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CISS) submission into the impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats in Australia. Cattle Council and Sheep Producers are both committed to ensuring the effective control and eradication of feral pests and support the work of CISS in this endeavour. Improving Australia's response to the growing risks and impacts of feral pests will bring create a more productive, resilient and competitive industry.

The following points are Cattle Councils and Sheep Producers additional comments to the Senate inquiry.

b. The likely and potential biosecurity risks and impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats on the environment, agriculture, community safety and other values

The biosecurity risks and the impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats within Australia is increasing. More broadly, biosecurity risks are increasing in Australia owing to range of factors, including our increasingly interconnected world, changing demographics, climate change and changing global disease patterns. Pest species such as deer, pigs and goats now pose a significant threat to Australia's natural environment, agricultural land and production. Damage to the environment can

occur by deer, pigs and goats rubbing against trees, altering the native flora through grazing, and spreading weeds through the dispersal of ingested seeds. The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 identifies that Feral pigs threaten 40 native species through predation, habitat degradation and disease transmission. Pest species also compete with native animals and livestock for food resources, increasing the grazing pressure and often damaging and destroying crops utilised for supplementary feeding. These damages often carry a high financial price to repair and require the building of infrastructure to prevent and manage further damage. Psychological impacts on livestock producers can eventuate, particularly during times when seasonal and or economic conditions are poor.

With the drought currently affecting the majority of Australia, the increased grazing pressure from invasive species is dramatically affecting farmers' ability to feed livestock. For grass-fed cattle and sheep producers, a consistent supply of grass is necessary to feed and grow livestock and maintain grass-fed certification required to supply targeted export markets. Reduced pasture availability also requires producers to spend large amounts of money and time to supplementary feed livestock in order to maintain animal welfare and productivity. The flow-on effects to family and rural communities as a consequence of feral pests and the impact they have on livestock production, has seen many small thriving townships suffer as labour and productivity in those regions decline.

As deer, pigs and goats are present in every Australian state and territory there is a huge risk of disease transmission with potentially devastating effects on native species and livestock. Feral animals can quickly spread a disease across the country with no way of tracing the source of infection. While the sheep and cattle industries have not been affected by a significant disease outbreak in recent decades, an exotic disease outbreak could be devastating, particularly for our market access and productivity. For example, A national foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) outbreak has been projected to cost the Australian economy \$51.8b¹.

Currently Australia is seen as the source of 'clean and green' product for overseas markets as we are free from many of invasive species and diseases found in other countries, including FMD. Markets like Japan, China, and the US would be lost due to an outbreak of FMD, putting immense pressure on domestic marketing with an oversupply of product. It would also take significant time and effort to regain access to these international markets and rebuilding consumer confidence in the domestic market.

c. the effectiveness of current state and national laws, policies and practices in limiting spread and mitigating impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats

State and territory governments have their own laws regarding the capture and treatment of feral species. While this approach has been beneficial, it is important to consider a nationally coordinated method like the nil-tenure approach used for wild-dog control. Whilst current state-territory laws permit different baiting methods and incentivised culling, Cattle Council and SPA support the creation of a national system focused on mitigating the risks and impacts associated with feral

species. It is vital that Australia has a consistent approach to feral pest biosecurity risk management that allows industry to leverage existing resources, activities and investments, as well as to meet its obligations under legislation and national agreements.

d. the efficacy and welfare implications of currently available control and containment tools and methods, and the potential for new control and containment tools and methods

Sodium fluoroacetate (1080) is the major control tool used to manage the impacts of invasive species on Australia's agricultural industry and environment. Invasive species are estimated to cost Australian agriculture \$797 million, through predation on livestock, disease, competition for pasture and habitat degradation.

There is a strict regulatory framework surrounding the use of 1080, reinforced with scientific evidence from the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (AVPMA) as to the effectiveness of this target-specific toxin. Many decades of research and additional evidence from a review undertaken by the AVPMA in 2008, has shown that 1080 is the most effective, target-specific and environmentally-sensitive toxin available for use in Australia. Moreover, there are no current alternatives that deliver the level of control required to protect livestock and native animals.

1080 at the levels used for pest control is not toxic to native species, is biodegradable, and leaves zero residues in the environment, making it an efficient and sustainable compound for pest control. These characteristics make 1080 a more efficient control method than trapping and shooting. Trapping and shooting are labour intensive methods which are not suited to broadscale management programs. However, when used as part of an integrated pest management program to target multiple pest species, they can result in significant reductions of livestock loss and native species' conservation.

e. priority research questions

1080 is the best control method we have at this point in time for feral species such as foxes, wild dogs and pigs, it is important to continue research into finding new and more effective baits for a range of feral species. Cattle Council and Sheep Producers encourage further research into baits with varying levels on toxicity specific to different pest species. There is also scope for chemical castration through baiting as a more humane method of control. In the longer term, if we are prepared as a community to consider using gene editing technology in a considered way, we could ultimately make most offspring of invasive species male. This would accelerate the reduction of invasive pests.

Currently cameras are being used to capture the occurrence of pest species such as wild dogs in rural areas. Additional research could be employed to determine the threat that movement and spread of animals on the speed a disease could spread across the country. Capture and release with tagging could prove useful in this instance.

Research and solutions to the problems associated with invasive animals have implications for large numbers of individual farm businesses but also on the conservation and management of native flora and fauna.

f. the benefits of developing and fully implementing national threat abatement plans for feral deer, pigs and goats

The National Wild Dog Action Plan Co-ordinating Committee oversees implementation of the Plan and the operation of its National Co-ordinator. The success, strength and longevity of this program lie with its nil-tenure model, the commitment from industry and government stakeholders and the co-operation of all representatives involved.

The Cattle Council of Australia and Sheep Producers Australia recommend the Senate give serious consideration to suggesting this structure and modus operandi be emulated when developing a strategy for the control of feral pigs, goats and deer. It is imperative if any impact is to be made on pest animal populations that a nationally coordinated, nil-tenure approach is adopted. Government support would be critical and welcomed.