

CONTROL OF FERAL ANIMALS

At earlier NPNCA meetings the control of feral animals has been raised as an issue for further consideration. The attached discussion paper 'Control of Feral Animals' has been prepared for consideration by the Authority. At this stage the paper should be regarded as an interim document, to be further developed in the light of consultations within the Department, with the Agriculture Protection Board, and with others. The views of the Authority are invited as part of the further development of the paper.

In particular the Authority's views are sought on the paper 'Private Hunting and Shooting in National Parks, Nature Reserves, State Forests and Timber Reserves', which is appended to the discussion paper. Various sport-hunting clubs or associations have been given permission to hunt feral animals under strict conditions on particular national parks and one nature reserve in the past, and this practice was considered by the National Parks Authority to be a useful contribution to feral animal control. The Department has had approaches from the WA Field and Game Association, the Australian Bowhunters Association and a local group near Kalbarri National Park for continuation of this practice.

It is recommended that:

- (1) the Authority note and discuss the attached paper 'Control of Feral Animals';
- (2) the Authority note that the Department is developing an overall feral animal control program;
- (3) members of the Authority should provide their comments on the paper to the Director of Nature Conservation;
- (4) in the light of (1) - (3), the subject of feral animal control be re-listed for further consideration by the Authority;
- (5) the Authority endorse the paper 'Private Hunting and Shooting in National Parks, Nature Reserve, State Forests and Timber Reserves' as the basis, for the present, for the Department's dealings with private individuals and sport-hunting clubs or associations, noting that the practical effect of such endorsement would be that such hunting certainly would not be

encouraged, but that the Department would have the discretion to authorise private hunters it considers able to contribute significantly to feral animal control programs where Departmental resources for control are inadequate;

- (6) further to (5), approval should not be given to bowhunters unless it can be demonstrated firstly that bowhunting is an effective technique in terms of the Department's management objectives, and secondly that it is at least as humane as shooting.



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6 December 1985

BRW:SK

DISCUSSION PAPER

CONTROL OF FERAL ANIMALS

Introduction

- 1 Under S.33(1)(a) of the Conservation and Land Management Act 1984, the Department of Conservation and Land Management is responsible for the management of land including National Parks, Nature Reserves, State Forests and Timber Reserves, for the purposes and in the manner specified in the Act (see Table 1). The Department is also responsible for the conservation of flora and fauna throughout the State (S.33(1)(d)), and for that purpose administers the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950.
- 2 There is a need for the Department to adopt a policy on and priorities for feral animal control, particularly with respect to land it manages. The need arises from:
 - 2.1 the deleterious effects of feral animals on natural and modified ecosystems and on native wildlife;
 - 2.2 the interests of the Agriculture Protection Board and the requirement under S.39 of the Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976 for Government departments to control declared animals^a (and declared plants) on and in relation to public land under their control;
 - 2.3 the interests of local authorities and the general public including adjoining landowners, conservationists and recreational hunters who frequently seek information on the Department's policies and practices; and
 - 2.4 the limited resources available to control or eradicate feral animals.
- 3 Ideally, control of feral animals would be considered as one part of an integrated approach to the management of a range of species including:
 - 3.1 feral animals (i.e. species introduced from outside Australia), which may be declared animals (e.g. foxes, rabbits, feral goats, feral pigs, feral donkeys, starlings, sparrows) or may not be (e.g. feral cats);

a. 'Declared animal' and 'declared plant' have the meaning defined by the Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976.

- 3.2 domestic stock grazing on land managed by the Department (e.g. cattle);
- 3.3 fauna native to Australia but introduced into parts of Western Australia outside their normal range, which may be declared animals (e.g. sulphur-crested cockatoo) or may not be (e.g. laughing kookaburra);
- 3.4 native fauna occurring in their normal range which are declared animals (e.g. dingo, red kangaroo, wedge-tailed eagle);
- 3.5 plants, including weeds, which are declared plants;
- 3.6 companion animals (e.g. domestic dogs, cats, horses);
- 3.7 native species whose populations have increased as a result of human-induced changes in National Parks and Nature Reserves.

*n declared
weeds*

4 However, for reasons given in '2' above, it is inappropriate to await the development of the comprehensive approach detailed in '3' before addressing the issue of feral animal control.

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5 The following approach is envisaged:

- 5.1 general policy statement;
- 5.2 more detailed policy statements on particular aspects of feral animal control, as necessary;
- 5.3 management guidelines for Departmental officers;
- 5.4 incorporation as appropriate of feral animal control requirements in management plans for regions, specific areas and particular species.

Need for Control of Feral Animals

6 It is not the purpose of this paper to review the scientific literature on the effects of feral animals on natural and modified ecosystems and on native wildlife. The weight of scientific evidence, field observations and informed opinion is clearly that various feral animals cause damage which can be serious in certain circumstances. For example introduced predators threaten the continued survival of populations of a number of rare native species and introduced herbivores compete with native species, alter vegetation communities and promote ecosystem degradation. In order to meet its

nature conservation, management and timber production objectives, it is essential that the Department carry out feral animal control programs. It is not necessary to await the results of further research to justify control programs, although such programs should continue to be modified as appropriate in the light of research findings.

- 7 If control is to be effective, it needs to be carried out in an organised and efficient manner within the context of an overall feral animal control program, with appropriate follow-up action and monitoring. One-off or sporadic control measures will be of little long-term benefit in most circumstances.
- 8 Control of feral animals in Western Australia is generally the responsibility of the Agriculture Protection Board. The Department has responsibilities for controlling feral animals on land it manages; it also has an interest in feral animal control on other land because of its responsibilities for the conservation of flora and fauna throughout the State.

General Policy Statement on the Control of Feral Animals

- 9 The general objective with respect to feral animals is eradication on land managed by the Department unless there is a justifiable reason otherwise. The Department therefore will seek to reduce and if possible eradicate populations of feral animals which predate upon or compete with native species or promote environmental degradation on land it manages. The Department will also encourage control of feral animals on other Crown land and on private land.
- 10 All feral animal control programs should be carried out with due regard to nature conservation, environmental protection, animal welfare and other relevant considerations including the rights of the general public and adjoining landowners.
- 11 Recognising that one-off or sporadic control measures are often of little long-term benefit, it is desirable that feral animal control measures be carried out as part of a planned control program, with the recording of results and appropriate follow-up action and monitoring. Control will normally be carried out by officers of the Department and/or the Agriculture Protection Board, or by authorised agents of the Department. Control will be carried out in accordance with Departmental procedures and guidelines, using appropriate methods including shooting, trapping, mustering and removal, and specific poisoning.

- 12 The Department is generally opposed to private hunting of feral animals on land it manages and will permit it only in exceptional situations and under strictly controlled circumstances. This may include authorisation of private hunters considered by the Department to be able to contribute significantly to feral animal control programs where Departmental resources for control are inadequate. (See separate document 'Private Hunting and Shooting in National Parks, Nature Reserves, State Forests and Timber Reserves'.)
- 13 Feral animal control requirements will be incorporated as appropriate in management plans for specific areas and particular species. Where there is no management plan for a National Park or Nature Reserve, feral animal control will be regarded, where appropriate, as a necessary operation for the purpose of S.33(3)(b)(i) of the Conservation and Land Management Act 1984.
- 14 Recognising that eradication of all feral animals is not likely to be achievable except in particular circumstances, the Department will determine priorities for feral animal control from time to time. The protection of populations of rare and vulnerable wildlife, the progressive eradication of feral animals from offshore islands and the protection of areas subject to significant environmental degradation will be afforded high priority.
- 15 Recognising the importance of feral animal control and accepting it as an ongoing management responsibility, the Department will give high priority to the allocation of adequate resources to feral animal control on a continuing basis.
- 16 The Department will support research into the effects of feral animals and into methods of control. The results of research will be incorporated as appropriate into feral animal control programs.
- 17 In implementing its policy on the control of feral animals, the Department will liaise closely with the Agriculture Protection Board, including its Zone Control Authorities and Regional Advisory Committees. The Department also recognises its responsibilities to adjoining landowners and will co-operate in joint control programs where appropriate.

Implementation

- 18 If the above policy is to be effective, it is essential that a planned feral animal control program be implemented. The Department will work towards development of such a program, including budgetary aspects and identification of priority species and areas.

- 19 The following outlines some particular problems requiring attention. It is not intended as a complete list.

19.1 Fox

Fox predation has been a major cause of population decline, range contraction and extinction of many small to medium-sized mammals, and protection from fox predation is considered essential if mainland populations of some species are to survive. At present fox control is being carried out in some areas, e.g. to protect three wheatbelt rock-wallaby populations and on Tutanning Nature Reserve to benefit the woylie, tammar wallaby and brush-tailed possum (in both cases, funding and resources are from research allocations), and in some turtle-nesting areas. Research on the fox is being carried out in the Perup.

There is a need to:

- make a commitment to the continuing protection of populations of rare and vulnerable wildlife currently being protected in the course of research programs;
- extend application of fox control techniques successfully developed in the wheatbelt rock-wallaby study, to other relatively small areas such as Boyagin Nature Reserve (which has tammar wallabies and possibly woylies) and to national parks such as Kalbarri (tammar wallabies and rock-wallabies) and Cape Range (rock-wallabies and turtles);
- develop a manual of procedures on fox control for management purposes.

19.2 Offshore Islands

Offshore islands are of critical importance for nature conservation not only for their intrinsic values (including seabird and turtle nesting sites) but also as refuges for wildlife which is rare or extinct on the mainland. Western Australia has more than 1,000 islands, many of which are nature reserves.

There has been a program of progressive control of feral animals such as rabbits, rats, goats and foxes on some of the State's offshore islands. In light of the special conservation value of islands, there is a need

to continue this program of control with appropriate follow-up and monitoring. Of at least equal importance is the need to prevent further introductions of exotic species to islands.

19.3 Feral/Exotic Herbivores

Serious degradation has occurred, and is continuing, in many areas of the State as a result of overgrazing by goats, cattle, pigs, donkeys and rabbits. Control in a number of areas is required urgently.

- 20 In each of the above cases (i.e. 19.1 to 19.3) and for other feral animal control needs not listed, there is a need for the establishment of ongoing budgetary and staff allocations. It must be accepted that effective control is an ongoing operational activity which is not cheap. In some cases a particular park or reserve may need frequent control work in perpetuity (e.g. to control foxes on wheatbelt rock-wallaby reserves, unless research provides some as yet unknown method of controlling foxes), while in other cases control could be carried out on parks and reserves on a rotational basis, or as the need arises (e.g. in the case of feral ungulates).
21. Various administrative and operational procedures need to be put in place for the successful implementation of an overall feral animal control program.

TABLE 1 : DEPARTMENTAL LAND MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES PURSUANT TO THE CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT ACT 1984

CATEGORY	CONTROLLING BODY	PURPOSE	MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS
National Park (S.6(3) + 16(7))	National Parks & Nature Conservation Authority (S.22(1)(a))	To fulfil so much of the demand for recreation by members of the public as is consistent with the proper maintenance and restoration of the natural environment, the protection of indigenous flora and fauna and the preservation of any feature of archaeological, historic or scientific interest (S.56(1)(c)).	In accordance with a management plan where there is one, otherwise in such a manner that only necessary operations are undertaken (necessary operations are defined to mean those that are necessary for the preservation or protection of persons, property, land, flora or fauna, or for the preparation of a management plan) (S.33(3) + (4)).
Nature Reserve (S.6(4) + 16(7))	National Parks & Nature Conservation Authority (S.22(1)(a))	To maintain and restore the natural environment, and to protect, care for, and promote the study of, indigenous flora and fauna (S.56(1)(d)).	As for national parks.
State Forest (S.6(1) + 16(7))	Lands and Forests Commission (S.19(1)(a))) In the case of indigenous state forest or timber reserves, to ensure the multiple use and sustained yield of that resource for the satisfaction of long-term social and economic needs (multiple use is defined to mean as many different uses as are possible and compatible among themselves) (S.56(1)(a) + (e)).) In the case of state forest or timber reserves planted with exotic species, to achieve the optimum yield in production consistent with the satisfaction of long-term social and economic needs (S.56(1)(b)).	In accordance with a management plan where there is one, otherwise in accordance with the provisions of S.56 (i.e. in accordance with the purpose for which the land is vested) (S.33(3))
Timber Reserve (S.6(2) + 16(7))	Lands and Forests Commission (S.19(1)(a))) In the case of indigenous state forest or timber reserves, to ensure the multiple use and sustained yield of that resource for the satisfaction of long-term social and economic needs (multiple use is defined to mean as many different uses as are possible and compatible among themselves) (S.56(1)(a) + (e)).) In the case of state forest or timber reserves planted with exotic species, to achieve the optimum yield in production consistent with the satisfaction of long-term social and economic needs (S.56(1)(b)).	As for state forests.
Other land (S.5(g))	NPNCA or LFC (S.19(1)(a) + 22(1)(a))	To achieve the purpose for which the land was vested in the controlling body (S.56(1)(e)).	As for state forests.
Reserves for the conservation of flora and/or fauna, other than nature reserves	As per vesting (not NPNCA)	For the conservation of flora or fauna, or both flora and fauna (i.e. areas which were nature reserves as defined in S.6 of the Wildlife Conservation Act (1950, as amended) prior to commencement of the Acts Amendment (Conservation and Land Management) Act 1984, but which are not nature reserves within the meaning of S.6(4) + 16(7) of the CALM Act).	CALM is not responsible for the management of these reserves, but the Wildlife Conservation Regulations apply (S.130(3) + 149 of the CALM Act 1984).

(NOTE : for the purposes of this paper, marine parks and marine nature reserves are considered equivalent to national parks and nature reserves).