



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Feral Pigs**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 16 February 2004**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Billson, Bruce, MP

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**Question No.**

**Mr BILLSON** (Dunkley) (3.46 pm)—I rise to provide encouragement for the member for Calare on his motion on feral pigs and also to put on the record that there are things happening. We can be a little bit upbeat and a little bit positive about the fact that progress is being made. Perhaps his motion best reflects a bit of a 'come on', a bit of encouragement to keep that work going.

What I knew about feral pigs before being asked to speak on this I could have written on the back of a postage stamp, so my research has been quite thorough. I was encouraged to make a contribution. The best thing we can do at a national plan level is to not teach pigs how to swim. I am told, reliably, by my parliamentary colleagues in the north of Victoria that we do not have too many feral pigs there and that, as long as the Murray River flows, the feral pigs will stay mainly in New South Wales. That is the first part of our national plan—to not teach feral pigs to swim!

Feral pigs are a significant problem for farmers because they eat crops, pastures and lambs. The concern of conservation interests around feral pigs is their selective feeding, their trampling and their eating habit called 'rooting', where they dig out the roots of plants. That can have a negative impact on native plants and animals, including invertebrates.

I am also grateful to Choquenot, McIlroy and Korn, who in their 1996 publication entitled *Managing vertebrate pests: feral pigs*, published by the Bureau of Resource Sciences, highlight the quarantine risk that feral pigs represent in respect of the breakout of exotic diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease. On the other hand I am told, and reliably assured by my colleague the member for Solomon, that feral pigs are quite a luxury in the EU. A feral pig hits the EU market at \$80 a kilogram, and a feral pig into Japan is \$60 a kilogram landed. That represents a substantial return on a natural resource that is causing problems for our farmers, for our environment and for our land managers.

The government recognises and understands the concern about the impact of feral pigs. As I mentioned earlier, it is not as if the government has been sitting on its hands on this. The livestock production values and the environmental values that are damaged by feral pig populations are a huge motive for federal government involvement. As my colleague Mr Cobb mentioned, nearly three-quarters of a million dollars is being spent this year on tackling feral pigs. But the responsibility rests primarily with the states, as they are the primary land managers and constitutionally the jurisdiction with responsibility for land and water management.

Notwithstanding that fact, it is known that there is a feral pig problem in Kakadu, and steps are being pursued to address that through the threat abatement plan for predation, habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission by feral pigs, known as TAPP. That plan sets the national framework to guide the coordinated implementation of these objectives and actions to contain the spread of feral pigs, which have been recognised as a threatening process. The impact of feral pigs on threatened species in ecological communities is an issue which has been recognised under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. For my colleagues on this side, that is a harmonious coming together of interests through the EPBC Act. The three-month public comment period for the threat abatement plan for predation, habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission by feral pigs is now nearing its end. The final version of that plan is currently being prepared for ministerial endorsement. So there are things going on.

There are seven key objectives for the prevention of the establishment of feral pigs in areas where they are not currently present. I draw people's attention to the relatively inconclusive research available about the extent of the problem. To give one example and point out why there is a need for the kinds of research my colleagues have spoken about, there is a thought that the typical density of feral pigs is about one to two animals per square kilometre, but up to 80 pigs per square kilometre have been recorded in the Macquarie Marshes in New South Wales. So you see there are very high concentrations of feral pig populations. As I said earlier, there is an integrated strategy being put in place. I would encourage all the stakeholders to get behind that strategy.

Feral pig management in national parks is an issue for the Commonwealth. The Kakadu National Park Plan of Management addresses these issues. There is clearly work to be done as we better understand the plight of land managers and the consequences of a pig population that we can only nail down to a range of 3½ million to 23½ million. That is a huge window of potential population and underscores the need for further research and investigation, which is at the heart of the Commonwealth's response.

There are other issues around quantifying the environmental impact on threatened species in ecological communities. An example is turtle eggs. There is evidence that a feral pig can have a devastating impact on the turtle community, and I would encourage cooperative efforts in that area. *(Time expired)*