

# **INVASIVE SPECIES ACTION PLAN**

## **\$200 MILLION TO TACKLE PESTS, WEEDS & DISEASES AND ESTABLISH A MODERN, RESPONSIVE BIOSECURITY SYSTEM IN NSW**

We cannot take shortcuts when it comes to biosecurity. The costs to agriculture, our economy and to our environment are far too great to muck around when it comes to preventing and eradicating new pests, diseases and weeds in NSW.

Alongside climate change and habitat loss, one of the greatest threats to biodiversity is the rampant proliferation of invasive species. Pest animals such as foxes, deer and wild dogs and pigs cost our agriculture sector about \$720 million per year. They are contributing to the decline of many native animals (in particular, bird and reptile species), including approximately 40% of NSW's threatened species. Environmental weeds are having a devastating impact on NSW's biodiversity. Weeds threaten at least 341 vulnerable and endangered species (40% of those listed in NSW) and 64 endangered ecological communities (89% of the total).

It is estimated that pests and weeds cost Australia at least \$7 billion a year and that as much as 25% of costs to consumers associated with food products are due to invasive weeds, pests and diseases. A 12 month outbreak of foot and mouth disease would reduce Australia's gross domestic product by up to \$16.7 billion over 10 years.

The Greens support a tenure-neutral, well-resourced and scientifically based approach to biosecurity which focuses on prevention and eradication.

### **TO ACHIEVE THIS, THE GREENS WILL:**

- **Increase funding for biosecurity by \$200 million over four years**
- **Repeal legislation protecting feral horses and implement a humane, professional cull of feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park**
- **Establish a \$5 million/year High Risk Incursion Response Fund**
- **Adopt a 'permitted list' approach to the sale of plants**
- **Set clear targets for prevention, eradication, containment and control of pests, weeds and feral animals and undertake comprehensive statewide mapping**
- **Ensure lethal feral animal control is undertaken by professionals and landowners, not recreational hunters,**
- **Invest in research into non-lethal feral animal control**
- **Introduce 3 yearly State of Biosecurity reporting**
- **Establish an Independent, statutory State Biosecurity Committee**
- **Give joint responsibility for biosecurity to both the Agriculture and Environment Ministers**

# REPEAL LEGISLATION PROTECTING FERAL HORSES

## IMPLEMENT A HUMANE, PROFESSIONAL CULL TO REDUCE FERAL HORSES IN KOSCIUSZKO BY 90% IN 3 YEARS

The fragile and unique Kosciuszko National Park is under attack. The NSW Government is protecting destructive feral horses at the expense of Kosciuszko's incredible natural values and threatened species. The latest detailed aerial survey in 2014 found 6000 feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park. This is far too many horses for sensitive alpine ecosystems, and experts say the number is growing anywhere between 6 and 17% a year.

Guided by experts and the best available science, the Greens policy is for a short term aim of 90% reduction of feral horses in Kosciuszko NP within 3 years. This would be achieved using all effective and humane control methods including professional aerial and ground shooting, and muster, trap and rehome where possible. The Greens also support a longer term goal of full eradication for feral horses in the area.

**To achieve this, the Greens would:**

- 1. Repeal legislation protecting feral horses**
- 2. Implement a humane, professional cull of feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park**
- 3. Fund an ongoing targeted eradication program**
- 4. Lead cooperation with Victorian and ACT Governments and private landholders to achieve full eradication**
- 5. Prioritise the rehabilitation of areas of Kosciuszko National Park impacted by feral horses to date as part of our wider \$4 billion Protect Nature package**

The RSPCA supports professionally managed aerial culling of feral horses in Kosciuszko. An expert committee appointed by the NSW government to advise on feral horse control concluded that the most humane method currently available to achieve meaningful reduction in horse numbers is aerially culling in situ using highly experienced and skilled shooters and pilots. In the absence of effective non-lethal methods to rapidly reduce feral horse numbers the Greens also support a professional humane aerial culling program under the following circumstances:

- only undertaken by highly experienced and skilled shooters and pilots
- the point of aim for the first shot must always be the cranium
- if the first shot cannot be accurately placed then a shot is not fired

- only allowed in open areas with minimal high-canopied vegetation
- must take place on flat terrain rather than steep or undulating areas
- only allowed in cooler temperatures
- only target small groups of horses

## ESTABLISH A \$5 MILLION PER YEAR HIGH RISK INCURSION RESPONSE FUND

The most effective way to stop new biosecurity incursions, including weeds, invasive animals or diseases is through early detection and rapid response. This requires funding and resources to be available and rapidly deployed. Major incursions are expensive to respond to but are not regular occurrences and so are difficult to fund as part of normal annual budgeting. To fix this the Greens propose to establish a High Risk Incursion Response Fund, which would be separate from, and in addition to, current funding arrangements for biosecurity. This fund would receive \$5 million every year for rapid deployment in the event of a serious environmental incursion. Over time the fund would grow and ensure that there are sufficient funds available in case of a serious new invasive pest, disease or weed.

There are currently well established arrangements for rapidly responding to diseases which are agricultural threats, such as foot and mouth disease, under the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA) which ensure that funding is immediately available to address the threat. There are no such arrangements in place for responding to weeds and environmental threats such as Myrtle Rust, which is devastating our eucalyptus and tea tree forests.

The establishment of such a fund for environmental biosecurity threats was supported by the Natural Resources Commission in its recent review of weed management in NSW and has broad support from environmental and industry stakeholders.

The fund would be used for on-ground works for immediate response to new high-risk incursions, and not for ongoing eradication efforts if a weed, pest or disease has become established. Resources from the fund would be available for use on both public and private land as eradication of emerging threats is essential, regardless of land tenure.

## **ADOPT A 'PERMITTED LIST' APPROACH TO THE SALE OF PLANTS**

Currently in NSW, people and nurseries can legally sell and plant hundreds of different species that are, or have the potential to become, significant environmental or agricultural weeds. About three-quarters of the exotic weedy species found in Australia started out as cultivated plants and gardens comprise the major pool of future weeds.

Western Australia has adopted an innovative regulatory response to this threat called a 'permitted' or 'white list' approach. In NSW the current regulatory approach, known as the 'prohibited list' or 'black list' approach, is for the sale and movement of all plant species to be permitted except for those that are specifically banned. In Western Australia by contrast they have developed a Permitted List of all plants that can be legally sold, and any plants which are not on this list are banned.

The Greens policy is for the adoption of this approach in NSW to stop the unrestricted movement of thousands of weeds or potential weeds within the state.

## **CLEAR TARGETS FOR PREVENTION, ERADICATION AND CONTROL**

### **OF PESTS, WEEDS AND FERAL ANIMALS, AND UNDERTAKE COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE MAPPING**

Due to a lack of funding by successive governments the management of pests, weeds and feral animal populations has been ad hoc, poorly targeted and focussed upon containment and control rather than prevention and eradication. The Greens believe it is time to shift this focus by increasing the funding available to ensure that where invasive species can be successfully eradicated at the local, regional or statewide level resources are dedicated to that effort.

Currently the data available about the distribution and numbers of invasive species is limited and often unreliable. Without good data it is not possible to develop good strategies to eradicate or manage pest populations or stop incursions in new areas. As part of the new funding, the Greens will prioritise extensive mapping of significant pests, weeds and feral animal populations.

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## **ENSURE FERAL ANIMAL CONTROL IS UNDERTAKEN BY PROFESSIONALS & LANDOWNERS**

### **NOT RECREATIONAL HUNTERS**

Recreational hunting is a disaster for feral animal control. The evidence is that recreational hunters are often the direct cause of spreading populations of deer and wild pigs and undertake selective targeting of male 'trophy' animals which do not reduce species numbers. They also are responsible for frequent trespass and damage to landholders properties.

If we are serious about containing and eradicating feral animals like deer then this can only be achieved through a well managed program undertaken by professionals and landholders. This is also important for animal welfare as recreational hunters often leave animals wounded rather than ensuring a clean kill.

## **INVEST IN RESEARCH INTO NON-LETHAL ANIMAL CONTROL**

Non-lethal methods, such as fertility control or physical barriers such as fencing are important tools to eradicate or control feral animals. Currently it is not possible to effectively control feral species such as deer, foxes, rabbits and pigs with these non lethal methods alone and funding for more research is required to improve techniques and foster innovation.

# INTRODUCE 3-YEARLY STATE OF BIODIVERSITY REPORTING

In order to have a modern, responsive biosecurity system in NSW it is imperative that we have relevant and up to date information about the status and condition of existing biosecurity risks, trends and future threats as well as the effectiveness of existing programs. Currently in NSW a State of the Environment report is produced every 3 years and this is a vital part of ensure the Government is accountable and their performance can be assessed.

The cost of failure when it comes to biosecurity is way too high for serious problems to remain undetected due to lack of information or public scrutiny, so the Greens policy is for 3 yearly State of Biosecurity reporting.

## The report on the state of biosecurity would look at the following matters:

- an assessment of the status and conditions of biosecurity risk in the State,
- an examination of biosecurity trends and future threats, including the implications for the environment, industry and human health,
- a review of the programs and activities related to biosecurity, including those related to government, industry and communities,
- an examination of economic trends and of the costs and benefits (including economic evaluation) of biosecurity,
- any general recommendations for future legislative or other action appropriate to ensure the State's biosecurity,
- a statement on the performance and suitability of biosecurity education programs in the State.

# ESTABLISH AN INDEPENDENT, STATUTORY STATE BIOSECURITY COMMITTEE

The Greens believe that central to a modern, responsive biosecurity system is independent scientific decision making and accountability. Biosecurity should not be subject to the whims of politics. In order to ensure this the Greens are calling for the establishment of an independent, statutory State Biosecurity Committee, composed of scientific experts, a representative of NSW Farmers Association and the Nature Conservation Council and government representatives. This will give the committee broad representation and ensure that decision making is rigorous and accountable.

## The State Biosecurity Committee would have the following functions:

- to audit and report on compliance by government agencies with their biosecurity obligations
- to produce the 3 yearly state of biosecurity report
- to make recommendations to the Minister about plants for the permitted list
- to make decisions regarding the use of the High Risk Incursion Response Fund
- to promote a coordinated strategic approach to biosecurity issues,
- to review the biosecurity aspects of any local strategic plans prepared by Local Land Services boards and provide feedback to the Minister as to whether they are consistent with State policy and the principles of this Act,
- to provide policy advice on biosecurity issues.

# ENSURE JOINT RESPONSIBILITY FOR BIOSECURITY

## BETWEEN THE AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS

The Greens are concerned that too often in biosecurity funding and decision making environmental protection is not given equal consideration with agricultural protection. The Greens believe that a modern, responsive biosecurity system can and must pay stronger consideration to the importance of preventing and eradicating potentially devastating environmental biosecurity threats.

Currently Ministerial responsibility for biosecurity rests solely with the Minister for Agriculture. The Greens policy is for the Minister for Agriculture to have responsibility for decision making where biosecurity decisions relate solely to agricultural threats, the Minister for Environment to have responsibility for decision making where it relates solely to environmental threats and for joint sign off to be required where issues affect both agriculture and the environment.

So for example this would mean that if there was an outbreak of foot and mouth disease or citrus canker, the Minister for Agriculture would be responsible for the emergency response. On the other hand, responding to an environmental threat such as Myrtle Rust would be the Minister for the Environment's responsibility.