

# NSW Invasive Species Management Review

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## OVERVIEW

1. The impact of feral animals and weed plants on our economy and our ecosystems nationally is dire. I discuss those with which I have personal experience below.
2. Not nearly enough is being done to manage them on a national basis. Currently efforts are uncoordinated, largely piece-meal, driven by economic rather than environmental criteria and overly-dependent on volunteer efforts.
3. As far as I can see, the situation with many of the animals and weeds I discuss below is growing worse by the year.
4. Much more investment is urgently needed to **a.** better stabilise the existing situation, and at the same time **b.** develop and implement much more effective longer-term control or eradication methods for the key threats.
5. Though I have no personal experience with these, I am very aware and greatly concerned at the reported increases and damage done by feral horses, donkeys, deer, hares.
6. I have travelled in the Simpson Desert and was dismayed at the huge numbers of feral camels and the devastating impact they are having on the flora and fauna. To protect this precious and sensitive ecosystem from further destruction, a serious investment is needed in aerial shooting, without regard to the cost.
7. The quarantine oversight of imports seems to be under-resourced, given our vulnerability to introduced diseases (veterinary and human) and potentially invasive plants and animals.
8. I am aware too of the growing threat from marine organisms imported inadvertently in ship's ballast. This seems to be difficult to regulate and its management appears to need better resourcing.

## Feral animal management

As a small rural property-holder, I have had the following experience in attempting to manage feral animals, none of them satisfactory:

### Goats

I frequently have herds of up to a dozen goats wandering through my property. They jump my perimeter fences without difficulty, devour my pasture and devastate the native ground-layer, shrubs and small trees. I am in permanent fear that they will jump over my vegetable garden fence, which would be a catastrophe.

When a mob appears, I only manage to shoot one, or at best a couple, before all the others run away. This keeps them away from my immediate property for a while but makes no impact on the source population in the extensive areas of bushland to the south and west.

I cannot suggest how these all-pervasive feral pests can be better managed but I am greatly concerned at the impact this virtually uncontrolled population must be having on the bushland and native fauna throughout the wider area.

### Cats

I am well aware of the devastating impact feral cats are having on our native fauna and although I set a trap frequently, only manage to catch 2-3 per year. I would employ more effective measures if these could be made available: "Felixer", "Curiosity" or "Eradicat".

As the best longer-term and nation-wide solution, I want to see much greater investment in developing immune-contraception and bringing it to scale as soon as possible. I know this would require domestic pet cats to be vaccinated, but this could easily be incorporated with the other vaccinations already required.

### Pigs

These are a constant nuisance, wallowing in dams, destroying creek lines and ploughing up paddocks. Shooting is beyond my abilities and I have no other means to manage them. I have toyed with the idea of engaging a hunter with pig dogs but have baulked at it as impractical on a property of only 100 acres; requesting permission from neighbours to allow a hunter with dogs onto their land would probably create hostility that I wish to avoid.

### Rabbits

The population is recovering after it was greatly reduced following release of calicivirus. I suspect numbers will be back to nuisance levels in a few more years. My attempts to manage rabbits using fumigant pellets is both exhausting and ineffective at reducing numbers.

Further biocontrol methods need to be developed now, so as to be ready for distribution as soon as required.

### Foxes

I have mature alpacas, which are probably not vulnerable to fox attack. I do however have chickens and need to keep them in a very substantial, fox-proof enclosure. I participate in the district's annual fox baiting program and presume that I manage to kill one or two, because at least one of my 3 baits is usually taken. This program seems inadequate for the scale of the problem. A biocontrol agent or some other wider-scale control option is badly needed.

### Weed management

I have also had extensive experience in weed management, both as a land-owner on a rural property in the NSW Central West and as a volunteer bushcare worker under the umbrella of the Blue Mountains City Council.

### Experience as land-owner

#### Vipers Bugloss and St Johns Wort

These terribly weeds formerly covered every square inch of my property; attempts to manage them by boom straying was exhausting, expensive and ineffective. Both are now thankfully reduced to insignificance by the various biocontrol agents that were developed specifically for their control.

#### Cineraria

I attempt to keep this very troublesome weed at bay by herbicide spraying around the home paddock but I am very fortunate that I am not dependent on my property for my income; if I was, I would be rendered bankrupt by this weed. A biocontrol agent seems the only feasible way to control this weed but I'm not aware of any attempts to develop one.

#### Blackberry

As it's spread by birds, it keeps popping up year after year, especially in inaccessible creek gullies. Small seedlings can be dug out but foliar spraying is the only feasible treatment for more developed plants. (Scrape & paint, the method favoured by bushcarers, is way too labour-intensive.) Both are labour-intensive and on-going.

It's particularly troublesome on one of my border fences, where the neighbour takes no responsibility for its management – unless the local Council officer happens to look over the fence and issues a notice!

So eternal vigilance is the only management tool available.

#### Serrated Tussock

This is an on-going pest which I can only manage by locating the plants on foot and sprinkling selective herbicide on each. I was assisted by an officer from the local Department of Agriculture but still find it difficult to be certain about the identification of Serrated Tussock in the presence of other tussock grasses and timing is risky because the herbicide is slow to work, allowing the plants time to set seed and negate the effort.

#### Tree of Heaven

When I first moved onto this property, there were about 10 stands of ToH and we spent 5 years eradicating it using glyphosate and frilling or cut-stump. I have seen stands of immature ToH on neighbouring blocks and know these this will spread inexorably, to become major thickets over time.

### **Experience in bushland**

I was Coordinator of the Popes Glen Bushcare Group, one of the earliest and most effective of the groups formed under the Blue Mountains City Council Volunteer Bushcare Program, from when I formed it in 1992 until I stepped aside in 2022.

I and my volunteers worked with Council Bushcare Officers and various contractors on a multitude of weed species that threaten the Blue Mountains and Royal National Park bushland.

Some of the main ones were *Pinus radiata*, Holly, Gorse, Broom, Blackberry, Privet, Willow and Cotoneaster, but there were many others. Intensive and sustained manual removal and judicious use of herbicide are the only means of control because biocontrol agents are generally not available.

Our focus from 2002 was restoration of an extensive silt flat heavily infested with mature willows and a dense understorey of weed species. This work is summarised in our 8-minute video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=610sas330EQ>  
Our detailed report prepared for the Environmental Trust and covering the period 2002 – 2018 is available for download at <https://dl.bookfunnel.com/ebqais2pxn>

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