

# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

## **INQUIRY INTO PASTORAL LEASES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
WEDNESDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2013**

### **SESSION ONE**

#### **Members**

**Hon Liz Behjat (Chairman)  
Hon Darren West (Deputy Chairman)  
Hon Nigel Hallett  
Hon Jacqui Boydell  
Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson**

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**Hearing commenced at 9.05 am****Mr JIM SHARP****Acting Director General, Department of Parks and Wildlife, sworn and examined:****Mr KELLY GILLEN****Acting Director Regional and Fire Management Services, Department of Parks and Wildlife, sworn and examined:****Mr IAN KEALLEY****Regional Manager Goldfields, Department of Parks and Wildlife, sworn and examined:****Mr IAN HERFORD****Principal Rangelands Planning Officer, Department of Parks and Wildlife, sworn and examined:**

**The CHAIRMAN:** I declare the hearing open at 9.05 am and I apologise for keeping you for a few minutes. Jim, you and I know each other quite well, and I am sure you know Nigel Hallett, but there are a couple of members on our committee that you will not know, so I would like to take time to introduce them. We have Amber-Jade Sanderson from the East Metro Region; Darren West from the Agricultural Region, whom you have probably come across, I am sure; Dr Julia Lawrinson, our advisory officer. I am Liz Behjat and this is Hon Nigel Hallett. There is another member, Hon Jacqui Boydell, who I am sure will join us at some stage during the course of the hearing.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, gentlemen. You will have all signed a document entitled "Information for Witnesses". Have you read and understood that document?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you refer to during the course of this hearing for the record. Please be aware of the microphones and try to speak into them. Ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make noise near them, and if you could try to speak in turn so that Hansard can make sure that they get down all of your words in the right way. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript of evidence may constitute a contempt of parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege. So that is the formalities out of the way. Is there an opening statement that you want to make?

[9.10 am]

**Mr Sharp:** Yes, just simply to say that the submission that we made and that we are here to talk to was made at the request of the Minister for the Environment to be a combined one representing the

Conservation Commission of Western Australia, State Heritage Office, Office of the Environmental Protection Authority, the Department of Environment Regulation and the Department of Parks and Wildlife. The submission is in two parts. As you are aware, the first part is combined and the second part is primarily the Department of Parks and Wildlife submission. From our perspective, it is largely similar to the submission to the previous inquiry although there are two measures I would direct you to that are quite significantly different; one being the significant changes to the CALM Act by way of amendment, which acknowledged and provided for joint management with Indigenous people across lands that we manage and also now that act comprises rights to take into account access and customary use of areas that are under management. So those two elements are quite significantly different. We have also then entered into a process since that time, and that is why Mr Herford is here—into a strategic planning process for the southern rangelands, and that involves all the pastoral leases that have been acquired with the intention of the Department of Parks and Wildlife managing them and some of them are conservation reserved. That process is well underway. It is primarily being based upon significant stakeholder consultation with all of those that have an interest in those lands and their management and to have some interaction with them. So that is just amplifying, I guess, the changes since the last inquiry.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you for that. I have some questions here that we are going to run through, and then other members of the committee will also ask questions. The committee has heard a great deal of evidence in regional Western Australia regarding the difficulties pastoralists face managing feral animals, particularly dogs. What is DPaW's role in monitoring and controlling these animals and funding management programs?

**Mr Sharp:** I guess there are two levels of responsibility. One would be on our own lands and then participating with others. Could I direct to Mr Kealley, who is directly involved in those programs?

**Mr Kealley:** Certainly management of feral animals on any reserve, including the former pastoral leases, is part of what we do as normal activities. Our liaison—we do it in conjunction and very close liaison with what originally were the zone control authorities and now the bio-security groups and declared-animal groups across the rangelands. So we attend the meetings and try to integrate and coordinate our activities. The actual control mechanisms depend entirely on regional circumstances but include the employment of doggers, aerial baiting programs, ground baiting programs across rangelands, in accordance with state wild-dog management policy and our good-neighbour policy. So it is a very important part of what we do on the former stations and the reserves. Mr Sharp said that there are various areas of responsibility. One is the CALM Act reserves, like the national parks and nature reserves and the reserves scattered across the rangelands. The former pastoral leases fall into that direct management category. But we also have responsibility for feral animal control on unallocated crown land. That came to our department a number of years ago, and resources are directed to management within the buffer zones in accordance with the state wild dog control program. So it is a combination of all those things in terms of dogs, other feral animals, donkeys, horses, camels, rabbits, foxes, cats. There are varying degrees of control, depending on the level of impact on particular reserves.

**The CHAIRMAN:** How many doggers are currently employed by the department?

**Mr Kealley:** There is one in the goldfields region and there is one in the wheatbelt region which operates on the fringe of the agricultural areas. They are departmental doggers. But, as I say, we integrate very closely with the bio-security groups in terms of feral baiting and their employment of doggers, and they manage the royalties for regions funding that flowed for feral animal control. And there are other specific programs in the Gascoyne and Murchison area.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Do the biosecurity groups employ some doggers?

**Mr Kealley:** Yes, they do.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Do you have any information on how many?

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**Mr Kealley:** No, I do not. I am aware that in the goldfields they have a number of casual doggers and full-time doggers. There are four in a pool, and I suppose that would be the equivalent of about three full-time doggers.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So there are two directly employed by the department?

**Mr Kealley:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Has that number changed over the last five years?

**Mr Kealley:** No.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** Do you believe that you have kept up with the problem of particularly the wild dogs?

**Mr Kealley:** No, I do not think anyone has kept up with the problem of wild dogs. The issue with dogs is they are very established in large areas of the rangelands as a result of limited capacity to manage dogs. If you look at the average pastoral station, 50–60 years ago there were probably four families and half a dozen workers, including probably a couple of full-time doggers. Most pastoral stations now are single-person enterprises or single-family enterprises. On top of that you have got large areas of the rangelands that are not managed directly for pastoral purposes—some for conservation, a lot of mining company-owned pastoral leases, a lot of areas that are not grazed because there is no pastoral enterprise there. All of those factors combined have led to an increase in wild dogs and dingo populations, whether they have reinvaded or they have developed from the small numbers of residual animals. So it is really a capacity issue in terms of the ability to put in place the level of control that existed 50 and even probably 30 years ago. So yes, dog numbers have increased across the rangelands, and that is why the control mechanisms are designed to work on buffers, so where a pastoralist is running small stock or even large stock in it, there are buffers into the surrounding crown land and reserves where we undertake aerial and ground baiting and wild-dog control using doggers and other mechanisms.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** In a perfect world, how short of funding or resources are you?

**Mr Kealley:** That would be total speculation. It would be impossible to put a figure on that because I am not familiar with the whole southern rangelands. I think there is a fundamental issue here. Yes, if you threw a lot of money at wild dog control, you would get effective wild dog control, and that might be through fencing or it might be through baiting, but it comes down to finding the balance between what is needed to sustain a pastoral industry and what is able to be achieved in economic terms. So if you have millions of hectares of non-viable pastoral leases or leases that are not being grazed or no pastoral enterprises being put there, do you need wild dog control across all of that? Probably not. The idea would be to have control where it is likely to impact on pastoral enterprises. The issue at the moment is that the number of pastoral enterprises is contracting and therefore the amount of dog control is contracting and you are getting cells, I suppose, where you need to have control surrounded by areas where there is not much wild dog control.

**The CHAIRMAN:** When our committee travelled to Kalgoorlie for our regional hearings, we went on a site visit and we were shown some examples of a dog-proof fence that had been erected on some land so that we knew what we were talking about when people raised the issues of dog-proof fencing. Has the department done any modelling or a business case study or anything as to what the cost might be and whether they could even contemplate erecting dog-proof fences on lands that are controlled by the department that adjoin other pastoral leases?

[9.20 am]

**Mr Sharp:** To my understanding, we have not done that costing or modelling. Work is being done on fences. Generally it is not done by us; it is done through other agencies. We would comment into that process.

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**Mr Kealley:** There are suggestions of cell fencing in the midwest and around Kalgoorlie as it combines pastoralists, government, where it impacts our reserves—I think requests have even gone into government for some funding to achieve that. That would stop reinvasion of dogs from the outside, assuming the integrity of the fence can be maintained. Dog fencing is not new. There have been dog fences all over Australia for hundreds and hundreds of years. So basically it is a management technique, and it has worked on the Nullarbor, where there are small stock unit pastoral stations that have got dog fences around them, and that is the only way they can run small stock. Whether it is economic in terms of the investment required and the management of that and what you will get out of it in terms of the economics of the pastoral lease, that is the modelling you referred to, and I am aware of various other organisations, both private and government, that have done business-case analysis for that. We have not been involved in the process. It also, I suppose, presupposes that the wild dogs are coming from the DEC-managed lands, and that is not necessarily the case when there is an enclave reserve. It is not like that reserve is full of wild dogs. There are populations there. Wild dogs come from a whole range of areas, including the adjacent crown land. And to dog-proof-fence the boundary of pastoral land and crown land—in my region, the goldfields region, there are 40 million hectares of crown land—would require thousands of kilometres of dog fence, which would be very expensive and very difficult to organise, based on what they are trying to achieve in terms of fencing the boundary between the agricultural areas and the pastoral lands and the crown land in the Esperance area.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Despite the report of the committee from the other place, which you have already mentioned to me, in 2010 this committee received numerous complaints about the lack of management of former pastoral leases by the Department of Environment and Conservation and now DPaW. Should the department be acquiring land it cannot properly manage and are there current plans to better manage former pastoral leases?

**Mr Sharp:** Lands are acquired for a purpose; it is about representing biological values in what is a national reserves scheme, which is a national program. Ideally, all the management costs should be available to implement management. That is not always the case because of the extent of land in Western Australia. When we look at the equation of management, it is a third of the country with 10 per cent of the residents and therefore 10 per cent of the taxpayers, and so that equation means that we do have a specific issue around Western Australia. We are focusing on management and trying to manage well within the context of the resources that we have, and we do invest and try to get the best outcome. That is why I made a point of making Mr Herford available, which is that we are consulting extensively with all our neighbours and stakeholders to look at how we go about future management and take on board their needs and concerns in a framework which represents the resources we have and the issues that they have, and I think that in itself is a very important investment for us to understand what those issues might be and where we might best invest our efforts to get the best outcomes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Do you want to make some comments in that regard?

**Mr Herford:** Yes. In addition to what Jim has said, one of the issues with land management is the setting of priorities. There will always be, as there are in a household or whatever, a thousand jobs that need doing, and the important thing is to work out which are the top of the list; which ones do you hit first. And with the stakeholders we have actually gone through a process for the preparation of a draft strategic plan, having a go at setting priorities across these lands so that what we are sure of after the strategy is agreed is that we are putting the resources into the highest priority tasks. If the issue is wild dogs, we do not want to be spending the money on a new solar system for the household or whatever. So the idea is we will come out with a prioritised framework, I suppose, for management of the lands in the southern rangelands, which should, and it is certainly the objective, ensure that we are deploying the resources to the greatest effect.

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**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** What sort of time frame are you working on there, Ian, and how long has this been going?

**Mr Herford:** We hope to release a draft document for public comment early in 2014.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** And implement it; bring it in?

**Mr Herford:** Implementation, I suppose, in some respects—because we have been working on it, it is already influencing the way we are managing things in an interim way, but after we finalise the document, and that means receiving public comment and then making the necessary amendments, it will become a blueprint for management of the former pastoral properties in the southern rangelands.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** You mentioned in your submission that overstocking was an issue you were looking at. Can you elaborate on that and how the department is working with leaseholders to manage that?

**Mr Gillen:** The comments in the submission relate to rangelands issues across the board, and overstocking has been an influence on the condition of lands through the rangelands and certainly was an issue and has been an issue with most of the properties that we have purchased over the last decade or so. And so our focus is on seeing the recovery of those lands that have been impacted by a long history of pastoral use and grazing. The grazing pressures are total grazing pressures, so they represent the impact not only of grazing stock but also of feral animals, and native grazers, kangaroo populations, associated with a system that utilises many artificial water points that have been introduced into the landscape. So the combination of all of those factors contributes to grazing pressures on property. The way we are managing our properties is to remove that grazing pressure to the greatest possible extent to allow recovery of the systems, and that recovery will take a long time.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** We have heard in some of these hearings that you do not want UCL as a neighbour; pastoralists do not want to be next to reserves. They find that they have some difficulties working with the department in managing, as we talked about, and you mentioned, Ian, about priorities. Of course, where you have limited resources you need to prioritise, but at what level do you consult with the pastoral industry about what those priorities are? Do you consult with the pastoral industry about what those priorities are? Are they sort of set within or do you go out and speak to other people and say, “Would you agree that these are the priorities?” Is it perhaps the case that pastoralists have a different set of priorities to what the department has and that there could be some level of conflict there?

**Mr Sharp:** If I could initially respond and then pass it over. We are as an agency committed; we have a good-neighbour policy and we see that we are in the business of being in the rangelands part of the rangelands community and we need to be seen as such and as neighbours. But, as I indicated in the opening comments, this investment in producing this strategic plan is very much about dealing with that and it is improving, as best we can, our visibility and our connection with stakeholders and neighbours in the process to understand those needs. So, member, this is our investment in trying to improve that understanding and that relationship.

**Mr Herford:** We have had direct contact. We are rolling out a series of neighbour meetings and we have held three in the series. I do not know whether you are familiar with the geography of the southern rangelands properties that we manage, but the properties in the area of Muggon in the area around Karara and in the Doolgunna and Moologool area—we have actually convened meetings out on site, and the neighbours have come in and spent time with us. We have actually had a meal together on a number of occasions. And so we have talked formally and informally and hopefully strengthened bonds a bit, and the reaction we have had from the neighbours to those meetings has been very positive. When we held the first one we were not sure whether we would be welcomed or greeted slightly differently, but we have had incredibly good feedback from the pastoralists, who

said a couple of things. The first is they appreciated the opportunity to meet with us and to contribute to the preparation of the strategic plan and “don’t be strangers”, and that has been a constant message that has come through. So it is around about a year now since the first of those two meetings was held, and we have just sent out the first of what will be a series of updates, just letting them know what the issues are that we have been dealing with on the property over the last year, inviting them to get back to us if they have any questions or comments to make on that and offering a further meeting should the neighbours feel that that would be a useful thing.

[9.30 am]

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Which begs the question why perhaps that has not occurred in the past, but we will look forward. This is a sort of ongoing dialogue that you intend to keep and maintain with stakeholders?

**Mr Herford:** Yes, it is.

**Mr Sharp:** In response to the comment about the past, I guess that was a question of resourcing, and we have taken some resources and focused on relations rather than necessarily on the ground, and that resource is going to be paying that dividend, and so that is part of that answer.

**Mr Kealley:** If I can make just one supplementary comment. These types of meetings and these types of planning processes—as a local manager—they are not the only contact we have. We have almost daily contact with some of our neighbours. We have contact with pastoralists through forums in Kalgoorlie, the biosecurity group. We meet with neighbours when we are travelling around. Staff meet with neighbours over fencing issues and dogging issues. So there is that personal contact with our direct neighbours. There is more general contact with regional neighbours, I suppose. Then there are processes and even things like the pastoralists and graziers meetings which we sometimes get invited to. So it is normal. In my case I have a very extensive network across my region, developed over 30 years, and I have no hesitation at six o’clock in the morning in ringing up a neighbour to talk about a fencing issue, and he or she has no hesitation in ringing me up at six o’clock in the morning to do the same, and it happens probably on a weekly basis.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Fire management, particularly in the Kimberley, is a major issue, and that certainly was the evidence when we took our hearings in Fitzroy Crossing, listening to some of the pastoralists and the issues that face them each bushfire season. Can you explain your department’s role in the area of fire management?

**Mr Sharp:** Yes. Could I make a couple of comments prior to getting to the specific? Across a large portion of the Kimberley there has been a considerable commitment by the government through the Kimberley science and conservation strategy towards fire management. That is where we have fire management responsibility through unvested crown lands or reserves or through agreement with other people, and that is about getting a major, if you like, conservation benefit of early-season burning versus late-season burning and its impact on the values of the region. And that has been a major commitment over the past four years, which has got significant ongoing funding. Mr Gillen might go through the formalities of our relationships outside of our own responsibility for our properties—that we have got management responsibility—and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

**Mr Gillen:** In respect of fire, we have got a major program in the Kimberley that is looking with a focus particularly on the early-season burning as opposed to late-season impacts, and that has been developed over a number of years. The program now is well in excess of a few million hectares. I cannot give you the exact number but I will provide that for you, if you like, in terms of what has been achieved; for instance, in this year’s prescribed burning program. It is broad scale at a landscape scale fire management, which is done primarily through aerial ignition over substantial areas of the country. That is done in close consultation with the traditional owners, in consultation with adjoining pastoralists and pastoralists with whom we have partnerships in relation to the

Kimberley science and conservation strategy. We also work closely with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services in the context of that broad program across the Kimberley, and the results of the program over the last couple years has led to a significant reduction in the impact of late-season burns, and in terms of our broader biodiversity responsibilities and objectives has really made some significant differences to the landscape in terms of the mosaic of vegetation age and the protection of special vegetation types that require protection from fire for periods of time because they represent significant fauna habitat types. So the program has been very successful. It is very strongly supported through the Kimberley and there is great opportunity for that program to expand with further partnerships, both in relation to traditional owners and also with the pastoral industry and their needs. A further comment would be that the state has also entered into arrangements with bodies such as the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, which has properties there and has a wide range of partners, and this department has partnered and provided funding for the widescale eco-fire program, which again is joined up in collaboration with a voluntary or, if you like, a non-government organisation and with numerous traditional owners, but it also includes a large number of pastoral leases.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are there any further questions for the department on any other issues? That brings to the end our questioning today. So thank you very much for coming and helping us with this inquiry. Every piece of evidence that we gather is all putting together that big jigsaw puzzle that is the pastoral leases at the moment I think. I do appreciate your attendance. Thank you.

**Mr Sharp:** Thank you.

**Hearing concluded at 9.36 am**