



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JUNE 2016

**Review of the Role of the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee
and the Governance Arrangements for Implementation of the
Action Plan for Managing Wild Dogs in Victoria 2014–2019**

Report prepared for DEDJTR

Executive Summary

Background and context

Wild dogs are a significant threat to Victoria's livestock industry, at an estimated cost of \$13–18 million per year. Wild dogs attack livestock, causing death, horrific injury, lost production and social impacts. The damage caused by wild dogs is confronting for land managers and the social impacts associated with wild dog attacks significantly affects the health of land owners and rural communities. The management of wild dogs has been, and continues to be a contentious issue in Victoria. The Victorian Government is committed to working with affected land owners to reduce the economic, social and environmental impacts of wild dogs in Victoria and to meet its responsibilities as a land owner under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*.

In 2015 the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR), in collaboration with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DEWLP), asked for an evaluation of the Wild Dog Management Program, to ensure Victoria's wild dog management approach remained strategic, effective and appropriate to meet the ever-changing needs of land managers, community members and the environment.

DEDJTR commissioned Marsden Jacob Associates to undertake an evaluation of the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee (WDCAC) and the governance of the implementation of the Action Plan for Managing Wild Dogs in Victoria 2014–2019 (Action Plan), to ensure Victoria's wild dog management approach remained strategic, effective and appropriate to meet the ever-changing needs of land managers, community members and the environment.

The Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee (WDCAC) was established in 2011 and its second term expired in November 2015, coinciding with this wild dog evaluation commissioned by DEDJTR. The intention of the evaluation was to help shape the delivery of the Program into the future.

The Program

The operating environment of the Program has undergone substantial change since 2011 with respect to:

- changes within the establishment of the WDCAC, the Action Plan for Managing Wild Dogs in Victoria (Action Plan) and the Wild Dog Action Plan Delivery Group (Delivery Group) (see Appendix E); and
- Victorian Government changes and associated Ministerial changes; and
- machinery of government changes that established new institutional arrangements incorporating numerous Secretary and executive management changes.

The Program, WDCAC and Delivery Group have therefore operated under a period of substantial political and machinery of government change. Taking into consideration these changes and the changing strategic outlook, a key question for the evaluation to answer was '*what are the best*

arrangements for the provision of strategic, high level advice and communication services and mechanisms to ensure delivery against the Action Plan?

Best arrangements for moving forward strategically

In part, WDCAC was established to provide strategic advice to government on wild dog management issues. In providing this advice, WDCAC influenced the design and operation of the Program with varying degrees of success.

Consistent with the Terms of Reference of the Committee to help inform continuous improvement and innovation in wild dog control in Victoria, on the whole, reforms to the Program championed by WDCAC appear to have been successful in enabling and reducing the instances of reported wild dog attacks.

WDCAC made an important contribution to improving communication, both directly and indirectly, between affected individuals and community, and the government. As part of this communication role, WDCAC provided a high level forum where community issues were raised with effect, in terms of engendering action and a response, and also as a mechanism to manage and align attitudes and behaviour of public and private providers.

WDCAC also made an important contribution toward improving landholder understanding of the scale, scope and timing of public management activities. This was important in leveraging more coordinated and aligned private control activity, while also subtly and critically improving public confidence in public control activities and reforms.

Collectively, government appears to have implemented WDCAC's recommendations, which have contributed to community wellbeing, and has worked toward alleviating what has been described to us by various stakeholders as a sense of 'helplessness' and 'abandonment'.

There is also emerging evidence of improved program outcomes and improved community confidence in the Program. Among others changes there is evidence that:

- the number of reported wild dog attacks has declined;
- there has been a broader use of a wider suite of control tools;
- there has been an increase in private control of wild dogs; and
- control measures are becoming more targeted and coordinated.

This improvement in confidence centres on affected landholders and is evidenced from a range of indicators including:

- positive feedback from WDCAC;
- positive feedback from landholders at wild dog fora and management zone workshops, particularly in the last 12 months;

- some evidence of reduced adversarial relationships;
- improved community participation and cooperation in baiting programs; and
- positive feedback from baiting program participants.

Many stakeholders believed these changes reflect improvements to the:

- design and operation of the Program, such as improved access to public land, remote baiting and improved response times;
- communication and reporting to landholders of public land management activities;
- engagement with landholders in the design, implementation and timing of management activities at management zone level; and
- landholder practice change programs.

WDCAC is perceived by many to have enabled or helped facilitate these improved outcomes.

However, we note that a challenge in this assessment is the difficulty in clearly establishing causal links between actions and outcomes, and then in separating the impacts of actions by others. This is particularly the case where there was complementary or joint contribution to the outcome by both WDCAC and government.

For example, the Directions Statement developed through WDCAC gave greater clarity of purpose and outcome to the Program, but not all success can be solely attributed to this document.

Moreover, WDCAC's championing and engendering momentum toward a Catchment Management Authority (CMA) zone management, accountability and engagement model helped facilitate complementary initiatives, some of which were in train by government, particularly:

- the establishment of Community Engagement Officers and the Bait Coordinator Program; and
- increased community participation in control measures through management zone arrangements.

While these outcomes are to be lauded, there are concerns that WDCAC has at times been too operationally focused and has had a tendency to get bogged down running or directing activities of the Program independent of the planning process — and thereby stepping beyond its remit.

Over time, however, the bigger picture momentum of WDCAC waned and the generation of new strategic ideas diminished, with the WDCAC becoming more an endorsement vehicle for departmental activities. In addition, some stakeholders indicated potential gaps in confidence in the Program by groups concerned with wildlife and animal welfare issues.

Another challenge is that WDCAC was seen by some stakeholders to be somewhat ‘landholder-centric’ with a reporting focus towards enhancing farm productivity. A key challenge is balancing the representation and skill in the provision of strategic advice. The previous balance toward landholder representation created gaps in a skills based board in areas such as science, governance and biodiversity conservation among others.

The Delivery Group

The Delivery Group played an important role during the Coalition Government phase of the Action Plan.

During this phase the Delivery Group was chaired by the Parliamentary Secretary and met frequently to progress and report on issues and activities. More recently and reflecting governance changes, the Group has met less frequently and as a consequence reporting against the Action Plan has diminished.

In terms of efficacy, our key finding is that during 2014, the group was a very effective mechanism to ensure accountability for deliverables under the Action Plan.

We note the Delivery Group has reviewed a substantial amount of program documentation relating to program delivery issues such as operational design and implementation matters (such as bait availability), area management planning, communications (such as feedback on community fora) and, in particular, clarified a range of issues relating to the overlay of associated policy and regulation associated with the environment, animal welfare and chemical use.

The Delivery Group provided an important mechanism for some members to have a stronger connection to the Minister’s office — providing a line of sight both into and out of the office.

Another key observation was the important role the Delivery Group played in giving some sense of ownership of program delivery and outcomes to the Parliamentary Secretary. A number of stakeholders commented that the Chair became a helpful advocate and ‘roving ambassador’ for the Program and in doing so became another important mechanism for program liaison with affected communities.

Our view, supported by a majority of those we consulted with, is that recommending the group would be valuable.

We see a group such as the Delivery Group as being important for the future delivery of the Action Plan, especially given the breadth and scope of the plan and the dispersed accountabilities. In the absence of the group, there is a substantive risk of drift on Action Plan accountabilities and outcomes.

There has however, been a lack of clarity from WDCAC and the wild dog operations group within DELWP, as to the Delivery Group’s role in driving the implementation of the Action Plan. Indeed, the

feedback of some stakeholders was that they did not understand the importance or relevance of the Delivery Group.

In part this reflects that under the current Government the group has not met, reflecting the absence of a Chair. However, we do note that as an interim measure a working group of departmental staff meet informally to continue liaison between DEDJTR and DELWP on issues relating to the Program.

If a new advisory board is formed, a key issue will be to appropriately clarify the role of the Delivery Group in delivering the Action Plan.

Assessment of the Action Plan

It is a difficult task to assess the progress of the Action Plan on two fronts. Firstly, the action plan had been in existence for less than one year (less than 15% of the proposed life of the activities and actions) and secondly, the implementation report was last updated in September 2014 in preparation for the November 2014 Delivery Group meeting. Our discussions indicate that there have been a number of areas of progress relating to the Action Plan since the last meeting.

We consider the pace of progress against the Action Plan to be moderate. As it is early in the action plan period (the action plan runs from 2014 to 2019), the vast majority of the activities are ongoing and not many of the outputs have yet been delivered.

In spite of perceived gaps and risks associated with the Action Plan, opportunities exist to improve its purpose. These include a refresh and reassertion of the plan to:

- clarify priority areas of action and areas where strategic advice will be sought on a yearly basis;
- develop and include a program investment logic map to define relationships of outputs to outcomes;
- agree and establish a process for adding and prioritising new activities and actions;
- develop performance indicators and establish independent assessment of progress;
- link measures to project deliverables – in particular zone management plans;
- include a forward look operating context and assessment of emerging strategic landscape; and
- specify a new operating period for the plan.

There has been limited ownership of the Action Plan by a number of key stakeholders. A concern is that Action Plan is seen by some stakeholders as a DEDJTR document and in some cases not relevant to program delivery. There is also confusion over the relationship between the Action Plan and the Directions Statement. If governance is to be reformed successfully, the vision, purpose, actions

and accountabilities must be accepted and understood by all. This is likely best achieved by the development of a new Action Plan.

In regards to the National Wild Dog Action Plan (NWDAP), we see commonality between the two plans and scope for further alignment particularly in relation to measurement and evaluation.

Conclusions and Future Options

Machinery of Government

The current one program two-department model (with the split of DEDJTR and DELWP roles and responsibilities) could be maintained with some modification to current governance arrangements. This is not to say there may not be opportunities to centralise policy and operations at some point in the future.

Advisory board

Establish a new advisory board based on a new Terms of Reference. And seek expressions of interest for positions on the new advisory board.

There is a need for 'gap filling' by the WDCAC taking into consideration the split of strategic policy and operations and the need to balance representation and skill in the provision of strategic advice.

An advisory board can assist:

- to drive action when issues fall between cracks;
- DEDJTR to understand grass roots issues in policy design; and
- DELWP to link operations to strategic priorities and community expectations.

The advisory board could:

- retain core functions of strategic advice, representation and communication; and
- report to the DEDJTR through the Lead Deputy Secretary Agriculture, Energy and Resource.

The scope of membership could be altered to include:

- an independent Chair;
- up to three landholder representatives with appropriate wild dog, land management and governance skills;
- up to three non-landholder representatives — covering skills that are relevant to the areas of strategic advice defined in a new advisory board Terms of Reference. This could include for example strategic issues relating to catchment management, biodiversity conservation, community welfare and response and the science of wild dog management; and

- consideration could be given to the inclusion of animal welfare advice on an as-needs basis at some point in the future.

Departmental officers should be excluded from membership to avoid accountability and reporting confusions. However, this should not preclude staff from invitations to present on matters agreed between the Chair and the Lead Deputy Secretary.

The advisory board should be supported by the Secretariat to conduct business efficiently with this function provided independently of any policy information provision from departmental policy staff.

Against this background our consultations indicate a range of emerging strategic issues on which advice from an advisory board would also be valuable; these include:

- a likely elevation of animal welfare concerns (both relating to the control of wild dogs and affected livestock and native species) — for example, an immediate emergent issue is the sun-setting of Ministerial approval of the 72 hour trap inspection requirement;
- the need to leverage private investment to fund ongoing and new initiatives. Here we note the likely sun-setting of Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) program funding, the relatively high delivery costs and limited program budget, and an absence of cost recovery (noting there was no expectation in the Program of cost recovery) of direct program delivery costs;
- a risk that the wild dog problem is viewed as having dissipated in some areas as a result of control successes and evidence of a reduction in the number of incident reports;
- balancing of environmental, animal welfare objectives with farm productivity outcomes; In this evaluation we canvassed and considered a wide range of alternative approaches to the current governance arrangements including:
 - a variety of machinery of government changes;
 - abolishing the WDCAC; increasing its responsibilities; or replacing it with other mechanisms — we propose a series of reforms to form a new advisory board; and
 - abolishing through to changing the Delivery Group — we propose a series of reforms to form a new Delivery Group.

The Terms of Reference could define the scope of activities and an annual work plan of the advisory board should be provided to the Chair. The work plan could clarify that advice is to be both self-generated and where sought, developed in consultation with the department.

There should be a regular cycle of performance review of the Chair and the Committee.

The Action Plan should be updated and where appropriate streamlined to reflect the achievement of past outcomes and current and future needs — this could also provide an opportunity to clarify Directions Statement arrangements and prioritise actions in the Action Plan.

Delivery Group

Options for the reform of the Delivery Group include:

- continuation through new chairing arrangements;
- membership with key accountable Divisional officers; and
- the establishment of a mechanism for the inclusion, exclusion and prioritisation of actions in the new Action Plan.

Governance

Given the unique characteristics of the wild dog problem there could be substantive risks to the Program if governance arrangements were to be radically changed at this point in time. Instead, our suggestion is for modest stepwise reforms and clarification to roles and functions.

Over and above reforms to governance, there is an urgent need to clarify the relationship, hierarchy and content of the key guiding documents relating to the Program.