ELECTION 2019: $50 million in additional funding to improve pest and weed management on public and private land

Pest animals and weeds cost the New South Wales economy nearly $2 billion per year. NSW Farmers is calling for $50 million to increase funding to support management of these threats to our environment, agriculture and our economy.

To effectively control pests and weeds it is imperative that all land managers play their part. The new Biosecurity Act 2015 sets clear, tenure neutral management obligations for all landholders. However, inadequate resourcing of the relevant government agencies severely limits the ability of public land managers to uphold their general biosecurity duty.

Grants to support public land pest and weed management

An ongoing $20 million program for pests and weeds management on public land is needed to improve the environment and help private landowners manage their own properties. Left unmanaged, road and rail verges, national parks and other public land areas are safe havens for weeds to flourish, threatening agricultural productivity and reducing biodiversity.

Once the drought breaks it is anticipated that weeds will flourish, pushing out native species and delaying the growth of crops and the regrowth of pasture essential for livestock. Giving public land managers financial support to better manage pests and weeds will be enable swifter drought recovery and prevent the further incursion of weed stocks across the state.

NSW Farmers is calling for grants to be available to public land managers to assist in weed management. This will assist local governments, national parks and others to determine the particular issues in their area and apply for the necessary financial support to get on top of weeds before they take hold.

Funding certainty for the Local Land Service

NSW Farmers is calling for an additional $11 million over four years to ensure that the public good and industry coordination functions of the Local Land Service (LLS) are continued and strengthened.

LLS is a unique service provider, giving producers in New South Wales valuable assistance in managing their lands, understanding innovation and responding to biosecurity outbreaks in addition to natural resource management, emergency management and agricultural extension. It is essential that this service is maintained and strengthened.

To support the essential work of the LLS, an ongoing and increased budget allocation is necessary to allow them to comprehensively engage with the full range of tasks within their remit. We cannot place the delivery of valuable LLS services at risk due to insufficient resourcing.

Investing in invasive species coordinators

To deliver a strategic and coordinated invasive species plan for New South Wales, NSW Farmers is calling for $10 million over four years to engage invasive species coordinators across all 11 LLS regions.

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The regional strategic management plans for both pest animals and weeds have now been rolled out across the state and the invasive species coordinator role has been created to coordinate implementation efforts in each of the 11 LLS regions.

Current drought conditions have exacerbated the effects of pest animals for many landholders already struggling to keep their stock fed and watered. Once the drought breaks, the next issue will be to manage the influx of weeds likely to emerge. An effective network of coordinators to manage emerging weeds will be essential to tackling weeds early and reducing any lingering impact on the environment.

Invasive species coordinators are engaged inconsistently across the LLS regions – some are recruited from within existing resources, other through funds available under the recently-broadened provisions of the Locust Levy. NSW Farmers believes that each LLS region should have a dedicated and properly resourced invasive species coordinator to ensure that there is a whole of landscape approach enforced in the targeted control programs with adequate attention available and paid to tackling pests and weeds.

To better understand the potential size and impact of the cost of fencing and pest management, NSW Farmers is seeking the establishment of a dedicated team to map where lands in the Crown estate adjoin private farm land. NSW Farmers considers that this would require four dedicated project officers working across the 11 Local Land Service areas to identify the National Parks/Crown Land perimeters and adjoining private land owners. The outcome of this may also inform a review of the existing legislation.

With the commencement of the new Biosecurity Act 2015, and the added requirement for new general biosecurity duties, NSW Farmers considers there is a need for a statutory review of the Dividing Fences Act 1991, particularly as it relates to Part 4, Clause 25 Application of Act to Crown and local authorities etc.

**Wild dog cluster fencing**

NSW Farmers is calling for $4 million to improve wild dog cluster fencing. We support a co-funding arrangement between the state and Federal governments to erect wild dog cluster fencing in New South Wales.

The impact of wild dogs on agricultural industries is well-understood, particularly with regard to lambing and kidding rates. In October 2017 it was estimated that wild dogs cost agriculture $89 million per year. The wild dog fence provides a deterrent to the south-eastern migration of wild dogs, covering three states – South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland.

New South Wales’ wild dog distribution data shows that dogs are becoming more prevalent, particularly in the north-west of the state, as the range and territory of animals expands. Wool, sheepmeat and rangeland goats are worth over $400 million to this area of New South Wales, and NSW Farmers considers that
additional funding is needed to protect these high-value agricultural industries from the impact of wild dogs.

**Extending the wild dog fence from Hungerford to Mungindi**

Currently the New South Wales/Queensland wild dog border fence leaves the state border at Hungerford, resulting in approximately 400km of the border to Mungindi being unprotected. NSW Farmers considers that there is value in extending the existing dog fence and seeks a commitment to act upon the findings of a recently-completed feasibility study into the fence’s extension.

**Kangaroo management**

NSW Farmers strongly endorsed the 2018 relaxation of onerous tagging and ‘shoot and let lie’ requirements’ to manage exploding populations of kangaroos. We believe that these measures be retained, not only during drought, but during any period where kangaroo numbers are unsustainable and exceed the national average by more than 10 per cent.