

# **ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land**

Dunkeld — 29 November 2016

### Members

Ms Bronwyn Halfpenny — Chair

Mr Bill Tilley

Mr Tim McCurdy — Deputy Chair

Ms Vicki Ward

Mr Simon Ramsay

Mr Daniel Young

Mr Tim Richardson

### Staff

Executive officer: Dr Christopher Gribbin

### Witness

Mrs Lisette Mill, Landcare Network facilitator, Basalt to Bay Landcare Network.

**The ACTING CHAIR (Mr Young)** — Thank you, Lisette, for coming in. There are just a couple of formalities that we have to go through before we start. I let you know that all evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Today's evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript within the next week. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website. You can get underway when you are ready. You have a little bit of time to do a presentation and tell us what you are here to tell us, and then we will follow up with some questions.

**Mrs MILL** — Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to come and make this submission. I work for the Basalt to Bay Landcare Network, and our community organisation's area of coverage is two council areas, being Warrnambool city and Moyne shire. Those two together represent just under 4 per cent of the land area of Victoria. We have existed since 2008. As I said, we are a community group; we are also not for profit. Our board is made up of community volunteers, and our main business is landscape-scale productivity and biodiversity support.

### **Visual presentation**

**Mrs MILL** — The following slides are a little bit about the region that I am in, and it is mostly farmland. This is a lovely shot of the vista from the side of the Tower Hill state game reserve. It is fair to say that the landscape of my region for Landcare is highly productive. It drives a massive regional economy. It produces significant amounts of primary produce and exports internationally. Seventy per cent of the land area of our region is agricultural land. Pest animals in that landscape hamper that productivity. Making up the remaining 20 or so per cent of land not in primary production or underneath houses are fragments of Crown land — things like schools, churches, water authority land, council land and reserves.

I did a little summary of Crown land in Moyne shire just to give you a bit of a heads-up on how it looks and what that means when I say Crown land and Moyne. There are over 900 separate parcels of Crown land in the shire. Only 9 of them 900 are bigger than 240 hectares; 240 hectares is the average size of a dairy farm. Only 35 of them are bigger than 40 hectares; 40 hectares is the minimum size in the council planning laws for subdivision. The largest are managed in the main by Parks Victoria — places like Mount Eccles, the coastal reserve between Port Fairy and Port Campbell, and Tower Hill. Some are also along waterways, so there are river frontage licences, streamside reserves and that kind of thing. This is an example from the Hopkins River at a place called Ellerslie. The land you are looking at and the scope of that photograph, except what is on the opposite bank, is Crown land. It is pretty, is it not?

Some are roads and roadsides, both shire and VicRoads, including licensed and unlicensed road reserves. Some are nature reserves. This is a property that I will be talking about later in the presentation called the St Helens Flora Reserve, which is part of our original submission to this committee. All, let us not forget, share the same pest animal issues with the private land.

This is the caravan park at Yambuk. This is a fox that, for a number of reasons, avoided control and became a bit of a darling with certain members of the community. But when you have a pet fox, you also have a lot of other problems, and the issue that council faced on this particular scenario was that some people in the community were reluctant to remove this animal even though it was behaving in a way that was highly detrimental to people bringing their pets to this particular caravan park. It is difficult to manage animals like this in the public space.

This is in Warrnambool. There is the railway station leading into Warrnambool, and this land in the foreground is known as Cannon Hill. It has the most rabbits per centimetre of any piece of land I can think of in my entire region.

**Ms WARD** — Come to Eltham south. You can see all the rabbits.

**Mrs MILL** — There again is the challenge of controlling a pest animal like rabbits in a high-density urban area where you have got multiple land managers, roads, V/Line, VicTrack and council. You have residents living nearby who do not want people to shoot the bunnies. You have got a whole range of issues playing out here, and yet here is the pest animal. You cannot avoid that. Pest animals are everywhere. They

do not care who owns the land or where the boundary stops and starts. They take the right to occupy wherever it is given.

With foxes, rabbits, cats and hares — and when I say cats, I mean feral cats — eradication is really an improbable goal I believe and so does the network I work for. Reduction and suppression is what I am here to present about, and it is a lifelong effort. Many pieces of land will experience multiple waves of pest animals in a landowner's time, and every generation before, since these pest animals first came to Australia. The scale of reduction can only be achieved with resourcing for long-term programs.

I believe the biggest issue facing Crown land managers wherever they are, whether they are the 0.2 hectare that happens to be Crown land in Woolsthorpe or whether they happen to be the 470-odd hectares of Crown land that happens to be Mount Eccles, out towards Macarthur, is not how many pests there are, but how do you get reduction of those pests when the Crown land managers are not resourced to work with and assist local organisations and private land managers in net reduction long term. That is a key part of one of the major issues that our network faces — how do we work with Crown land managers when they do not have the resources to work with us? Local action and unity really, really does work, and I hope that other people who have presented to this committee and who are to come reinforce that point with you — organisations that are present in the area where the issues are being faced, that have staff in the community at grassroots level, that can personally drive the messages, that can motivate the unity between all these different factions that own little bits and have their own goals, aims, ambitions and beliefs about what the impacts of pest animals really are; organisations that persist.

Certainly coming from working for a community Landcare organisation, I can tell you how difficult it is for community organisations without resources, with volunteer committees and members, to persist long term on one goal or even multiple goals. So I am going to talk about that local example. It happens to be land managed by Parks Victoria. I would like to reinforce that we get on very well with local Parks Victoria and we sympathise immensely with the lack of resourcing that they have as people keen to see the environment improve but also as an organisation keen to see the environment improve how restricted they are in what they are actually able to do.

St Helens Flora Reserve. It is halfway between Port Fairy and Portland on the south-west coast, inland from a town called Yambuk. It contains, in the 38 hectares that is this reserve — (it used to be a country racecourse) — over a dozen species that are federally listed. When I say 'federally listed', I mean that they carry the full weight of the federal laws in regard to their protection and preservation in the 38 hectares. Unbelievable, but it is true. The same piece of land also contains the full cohort of pest animals — foxes, feral cats, rabbits and hares — as does the land all around it. We can control, and we have controlled, these pests on the private land within 5 square kilometres of that reserve since 2012. That is something to hang your hat on, is it not? None of it has been funded by Parks Victoria. That is a source for jubilation, I am sure, with Parks Victoria because even if they had the money we probably would not be on the priority list, because 38 hectares really does not rate compared to places like the Great Ocean Road.

Who funded this work? Pacific Hydro — this is a wind farm at Codrington; Australian Bluegum Pty Ltd and a company called SFMES, both private blue gum plantation management companies; the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority; and the state government's local Landcare facilitator initiative, which part funds my salary.

Cameras I mentioned just before. This is the kind of information that they have been gathering for us, and we use them extensively in this location to learn about fox density. Individual foxes: what do they do, how do they relate to landscape around them? These cameras are not in the reserve; they are on the private land all around the reserve — because getting permits to put cameras in reserves is more tricky than you might think. This view that you are seeing right now, up on the top — every photograph is date and time stamped, so 05 is the fifth; 11th, November; 2016. Here is the fox that we are trying to catch at the moment. Other things have come and gone. This one has gone. It is the back end of the feral cat.

Using these kinds of cameras and monitoring them on a regular basis means that as a result of this type of activity I can ring up the nearest landholder to this image and say, 'I've seen a black cat. Is it yours? Do your neighbours have any black cats?'. If the answer is 'No', I ask, 'Can you do something about it?'

Within three days of this image being taken, that cat was no more. That is a good result because feral cats mow through unbelievable amounts of biodiversity every day.

We also have rabbits, as you would expect. We also have these things, which are called southern brown bandicoots. They are not as rare and perhaps critically endangered as their cousins, the banded bandicoot, which is more familiar in this part of the country, up around Dunkeld. Nevertheless, they carry the full force of federal law behind them. This population at St Helens is the last known in that entire 4 per cent area that I represent here today. That they even still survive in this 38-hectare plot is nothing short of miraculous, because trust me when I say that everything is trying to eat them. They are smaller than a rabbit, they are highly fertile and they are top tucker for anything that likes to eat mammals, including foxes, feral cats, snakes and all the cohort of native raptors. But they are here, and they are our ticket to encourage those organisations I mentioned before to help us achieve that fox control result.

This is a more recent photograph, and this particular bandicoot we believe has now senesced. That is a polite way of saying we think it reached the end of its life. This was taken in May this year and the animal was so unconcerned by my presence that it came within 8 metres of me standing in the farmer's paddock. That story was featured in the R. M. Williams magazine, the August edition of *Outback* magazine; and also in the Australian Wool Innovation's *Beyond the Bale* magazine.

Here is one from only a few days ago. This was taken on the 24th of this month. This is an unlicensed, unused road reserve. Moyne Shire Council, which is the default manager of unused, unlicensed road reserves across Moyne, to help, inspire and encourage has given us permission to do fox control on these pieces of land which are superb biodiversity links between reserves and paddocks. Even in the most unlikely place — this is the width of a road — you find things like this. You may not be familiar with what that little bird down in the bottom left-hand corner is but it is called a Japanese or Latham's snipe and it has a massive long list of international agreements citing how much protection this little bird should have. It comes to southern Victoria to fatten up every year before it flies all the way back to Japan to breed.

That these birds are coming to places where they are also suffering the impacts of pest animals is a great story for future land managers to look at and say, 'What can we do to protect these international travellers, as well as the ones that we have all year round?'. We have made a submission to the Japanese embassy, inviting them to come and have a look at this particular site and see this bird while it is in residence, but obviously having that fox coming through less than 24 hours before, we need to do some more things about it.

Our problems ahead are: how do we gain greater and more effective resourcing to build on the results that we have already got, funded mainly by private enterprise, and how do we gain permission to use the new pest control methods that are coming out, including the release of the K5 rabbit virus that our group has two areas for coming up in March, and things like what is in this little brochure that I dropped on you, the Canid pest ejector? This is technology that has been present in America since the 1920s. It has approval in Victoria from DELWP, but the land manager from whom we would most likely have approval for the use of this device is Parks Victoria, and for whatever reason Parks Victoria has not yet approved its use.

It is particularly effective in areas like St Helens where, as the locals say, in winter you could bog a duck. When you are burying 1080 baits into country that is that wet during the winter period, it is impossible to get effective control using that combination of baiting and hunting. So that is one of the issues, the slowness of permission being granted to organisations like ours that have got the track record and that jump through all the hoops required. We still cannot get some of these things over the line. But also how do we gain support from the Crown to support that local action, where we have got proof that we do a good job and it is working?

So I hope that the role of this inquiry will be to enable Crown land managers to work on local solutions with local groups, by giving those Crown land managers decision power and direct funds to do this but also to tell our story and invite some of those state managers at senior level to connect with us and some of the other people who have come and presented to you about what it is that we actually do, because there are great stories. There are great opportunities for them to learn and hear directly from the people that are doing this work what is working. Think back to that statement I made about the economy, about how omnipresent agriculture is in the region that I am working in.

Why is this photo of any note? That is a fox with mange. Can you see how the rear end of that animal looks like it has a bit more sunburn than the rest of it? It is sort of a grey colour? Mange is a mite that infests a lot of mammals. It is also able to be picked up by people. It causes massive and debilitating skin disease, and eventually it will kill the animal. It is a horrible, horrible, slow way to die. I hate seeing foxes with it turn up in front of the cameras, but I will tell you what: when we get one in front of the camera that is showing signs of mange, the immediacy of the response from the adjoining landholders to wherever this photo has been taken is massive. The last thing they want is an animal like that coming through their property, so they react very strongly and very quickly, whereas in other cases they may not.

When we talk about the money, why is it important that this sort of pest control happens? Because of that direct transfer threat to dogs and people, a lot of native wildlife suffers from mange as well, and foxes are a really effective spreader of mange. Foxes also spread an infesting particular tapeworm that affects sheep, which reduces their productivity and also degrades the meat.

Some of you might be familiar with hydatids and things like that. Foxes can spread that by eating infected animals, but also they spread distemper and some of the spore-driven worst-case scenarios that I do not think any of us in this room really want to contemplate, and particularly rabies and foot and mouth. We already have anthrax in Australia. We already have TB. They are a very effective conduit for those things across agricultural land, and I am pretty sure that the good people at Australian Wool and Meat and Livestock Australia would feel very strongly about this topic and how we mobilise against it.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Can I just interrupt for a second and ask how much more of the slideshow you have got to go, because we want a bit of time for questions?

**Mrs MILL** — One more, you will be delighted to hear.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Excellent. Go for your life.

**Mrs MILL** — I just wanted to reinforce with you some of the trade ramifications for tolerating pest animals, particularly foxes, which are a vector of speed for many diseases in the landscape. I would like to think that whatever I have said to the committee might engender some understanding of the complex nature of pest animals on Crown land. How we are trying to find that win-win situation for all concerned is tricky but not impossible when you have people like Landcare or community groups like Field and Game who are willing to take up that banner. And that was it — promise!

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Thank you very much. That was a great presentation, and we got a lot of information about that. Something that I saw was common between what you were saying and what the representative this morning, Mr Hodgens, was saying from the council was that Parks Vic as the overall land manager may not be doing enough out in these regions or may not be fulfilling what you believe they should be as far as obligations to control pests.

**Mrs MILL** — I believe they are on a hiding to nothing. Parks Victoria are good people, they are in the local areas, but the resources and tools available to them to manage not only their expectations but the expectations of the community are woeful.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — So in essence of the question I asked this morning, do you think the appropriate way to go about that would be to provide them with more resourcing, or do you think there are other avenues, such as council or even local Landcare groups, and providing them more resourcing? Do you have an opinion about which one would be more appropriate or more beneficial?

**Mrs MILL** — Like I said in the presentation, I think that unity is the really important asset in managing pest animals. Some people may believe there are no impacts to them. So you can have landholders, whether they are Crown or otherwise, who do not see foxes and feral cats as a problem, the same with rabbits and hares. Getting that unity and getting that resourcing spread but also with the understanding that the best pest control is integrated both in the method but also who is involved. While it can be problematic getting all of those people on their own together and agreeing on something sometimes, it is not impossible, and some of the best pest control programs have followed that format where it is a partnership between all land managers.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — So would it be fair to say that any extra money that was given to Parks Victoria to do pest control would have to be given with the undertaking that that engagement would happen with local groups and pest control actually would be taking place rather than the department probably prioritising the money in other places?

**Mrs MILL** — I think it should be something that is viewed as a greater priority, but I am sure there are cases where Parks Victoria has a large chunk of land and they just need to get on and do it, but where you have got large chunks of land that are also bordered in every case practically by either agricultural land or residential land it is binding that glues so that what is happening in one piece of land blends well with what may or may not be happening right next to it. A fox can travel 50 kilometres in a night if it feels like it.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — And obviously across different types of land — they do not care what is on the other side of the fence.

**Mrs MILL** — They so do not, no.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — There is something that I picked up from what you were saying about the difficulties of doing monitoring on some of these pieces of land. Would I be right in saying that is simply because of the type of land it is and its tenure?

**Mrs MILL** — Partly. There are a lot of regulations when you are monitoring, particularly with remote-sensing cameras, on public land, to ensure public privacy. There are quite a few hoops to jump through in order to get permission to undertake that kind of work, and it just takes time. Certainly things that have been approved by one government department struggle to get approved in a similar time frame by another, even though they are both land managers with pest animals. It just adds to the time it takes before action can really happen.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — So are there any administrative things that could be changed that you are aware of that might help us in making recommendations on how to make those processes easier?

**Mrs MILL** — I certainly think that there is cause for questions to be asked as to why this canid pest ejector technology can be approved by DELWP for use and still is yet to be approved by Parks Victoria when Parks Victoria has the lion's share of the land on which that technology could be used and used in a way that saves not only the money but also reduces the threat of off-target poison.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — On a bit of a different topic, something that I have noticed in coming out here — and not just here, but other regional hearings that we have had, and something that is quite different to when you talk to big departments and inner-city sort of groups — is that everyone seems to be relatively on the same page. Whilst there might be little differences, you find that the local Landcare group is working well with the field and game, and they are working well with the council and everyone is sort of meshed in together. Do you think that there is a particular reason for that, or are there lessons that the big departments in the city could take from that?

**Mrs MILL** — I think it is probably fair to say that Landcare tries to be the antithesis of siloism. It is very easy to float your own boat and tack your own path. However, in country areas many of the people who are in one organisation are in multiple organisations, because the number of people available for any volunteer committee is smaller. You have a lesser pool of people to draw on, so it makes good business sense in getting messages out and getting change to actually happen and be viewed as positive and supportive to work with many organisations, because a gang of one is really ineffective in this kind of work.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Do you think that kind of relationship holds between other groups that are trying to all work to the same goal?

**Mrs MILL** — I will say this: in order to get a lot of the funding that is available for pest animal programs you have to prove that you are a good collaborator. You have to collaborate; you have to collaborate anyway when you tell landholders that you are doing baiting in an area — you have to go through that step by law — but collaboration with land managers, whoever they might be, whether it is the

Crown or otherwise, is really the key to the long-term success. Where those funding streams are short term, like less than a year or less than three years, it is really difficult to sustain the impact of the works, because within a year of ceasing fox baiting in the St Helens area we know that the numbers would go back up to what they were previously very quickly.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — I would assume it would be the same on Griffiths Island if the other programs were stopped, like what Field & Game do.

**Mrs MILL** — Well, I think it is fair to say from the research that has been done in Australia that there would be more foxes living in the urban parts of Port Fairy than there would be in the hinterland surrounding it. But as soon as those urban foxes are picked off, their cousins from the country come in and take up the easy life.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Just finally on that note of community spirit and engaging in this kind of thing and everyone trying to get a good outcome, do you think that it presents issues when you might get major organisations of one view — for example, an environmental group and a major organisation aiming towards a similar goal but of a different view to, say, a hunting organisation. When there are conflicts there, do you think that helps the situation? I know we might be talking about bigger areas, like large national parks and things like that. But can you see there being issues if, say, you guys were at odds with Field & Game and you were not all working together?

**Mrs MILL** — There are always issues when you have disagreements with whoever you have a disagreement with, and the facilitation trick of it is to try and find the common ground. Agree to disagree on some things and do what you can with what you can agree on. But you can only find agreement if you know what the other people are doing and get to know them and they get to know you, and that is reiterating what I said before about that grassroots, local community action where people are present, they have been present for a time, so that when somebody wants to ring up and talk to me about a program that we have been running now for four and a half years in the St Helens area, I can say, ‘Here is the journey that we have taken. It has not been without rocks and hiccups and wheels falling off, but we’re having a go and we’re doing something that, because there are federally listed species involved, is really important’, not just for the manifesto of the group I work for but also for that heritage that is getting eaten every night if we do nothing. Doing nothing is sometimes worse.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — That is what consultation is all about.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Congratulations on the work you are doing, particularly in the Landcare field, working with farmers and trying to encourage them to grow trees and increase the productivity of their properties. It is interesting to note that the environment officer from Moyne, who was here this morning, when I raised a question about what engagement they have with Landcare groups said very little in relation to the environmental controls, pest animals particularly and rabbits, which I find somewhat strange given that the areas that I represent have quite a good coordination of the department of whatever it is called now — agriculture cum environment, planning and whatever else — and Landcare and councils.

The three really are good partners in pest control, but it seems to be waning or lacking in Moyne particularly. I would like to hear your views on that. Also you have raised the issue around funding, which has crept through the discussion and through the previous witnesses as well. I suppose for the record I would like to hear what you think would be the perfect funding partnership between the stakeholders in relation to controlling perhaps more pests and weeds at this stage, given the inquiry.

**Mrs MILL** — I believe that councils, like other Crown managers, have an immense amount of responsibility and few people to actually deliver on expectation. For example, Moyne shire has one environment officer, and you have already met him. He is an army of one. It is very hard for one person within a council budget to try and effect change if they are not being supported from within council but also with all the other land managers. I know myself the tangles that we have to go down to try to move things along from a Landcare point of view, much less being a land manager like a council and trying and get the same result from their partner organisations.

That example of the unlicensed road reserve is a good example, because as soon as that piece of land becomes licensed, or if it ever became licensed for grazing, for example, the responsibility for that would shift from council to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. When we have tried to embed that piece of land, because it clearly has some quite significant biodiversity values, I suppose like a flag, a red mark on that property file to say this piece of land should be considered very carefully not to be grazed or if it is going to be grazed, to have a regime brought in that means the biodiversity values that are clearly there are not compromised, even just doing that is extraordinarily challenging for the government departments who have that ability to do it.

It is the same with weeds and pest animals. If you are identifying that piece of Crown land has pest animals on it constantly, trying to get that noted on the property file for that piece of Crown land so that somewhere along the line something actually gets done about it, is also extremely challenging. I hear in what Mr Hodgens has presented that frustration of: how do we build a gang that agrees on the same topic and actually does something where we all move together?

Certainly in the lead-up to applying to get K5 as a trial release site in our region on a couple of our projects, it was one of those occasions where it went in the local newspaper, in the *Standard*, and the phone just went nuts. People I had never heard from ever before and possibly will never again were ringing up very concerned about the rabbit plague infesting roadsides and paddocks and their neighbours and anybody else they wanted to talk about that they felt was not contributing to the control of rabbits and how they were hoping that the K5 virus will be this silver bullet that infects all of those problems. A number of those phone calls were about roadsides that are managed side by side by Moyne shire and VicRoads. I had this discussion with Richard about how we respond to these people who are slanging the Crown managers when there is an equal rabbit issue on the private land right next to it, and is it cost-effective for council to go out and do a rabbit control program on a narrow road reserve when the 200 and 300 hectares right next door to it are infested, and that is private land on which they cannot operate?

As far as funding goes, I do not really know if there is a perfect model but I hope whatever model might be approaching perfect would be something that resembles money being directed to the people who want to work in this space — to the organisations that are putting up their hands up now or doing stuff already who are saying, 'We're keen, we're motivated and we want to see this change'. Support the people who want to work in this space and through them others will come on board. Give those people the tools, because we are already doing it with what we have got.

**Mr RAMSAY** — So there is a consistent theme through the testimony today that Parks Victoria has no money for large-scale pest and weed eradication or suppression.

**Mrs MILL** — I do not actually know what their budget in my region is for those things.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Based on that, though, would you expect it to sit pretty low on the totem pole of priorities for government if there is not really sufficient money for Parks to be able to manage the land that they are responsible for in relation to pests and weeds?

**Mrs MILL** — Yes. I think their big challenge, though, is not only managing those large areas of land that they have — undoubtedly that is a lot of cash to be spending — but also they have no money for that facilitation with communities on getting reactive and driven outcomes. It comes down to us saying to Parks Victoria regionally, 'We have the money. We have the pest controller who meets all your requirements to lay bait. We can start now. Will you say yes?'. That conversation has been going on since March of this year.

**Mr RAMSAY** — So we are still talking and not doing?

**Mrs MILL** — We are still talking, and nothing is happening. I understand why people get frustrated by that slowness of response. It really should not be that hard. A complaints process has to be instigated in order to agree that a number of federally listed species, including those that are top of the menu for foxes and feral cats, should not be left hanging and wondering whether they are going to get through another year just because somebody cannot say yes. But there is no process for that. There does not seem to be a



template whereby if a community group comes forward and says, 'We've got the money. We've got the person. We can do it now. Just say yes', that yes can happen.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Thank you, and can I reserve my right to another question after Ms Ward has her chance to raise some questions, Acting Chair?

**The ACTING CHAIR** — You may.

**Ms WARD** — Have you had much success in getting Landcare grants from the state government?

**Mrs MILL** — Getting Landcare grants for pest animal control?

**Ms WARD** — For a whole variety of areas.

**Mrs MILL** — It is very difficult because, for example, the Victorian Landcare grants that are available to Landcare groups annually are managed through the CMAs, and they state that pest animal control is the responsibility of the landholder. There is no money for poisons. There is money available for ripping warrens and things like that, but certainly outside of the boundaries of that, no.

**Ms WARD** — Richard was saying earlier that in the last couple of years there have been increases in the funding that council has received. Have you noticed how much of that has been spent on the ground, or have you noticed an increase in assistance that groups have been able to get?

**Mrs MILL** — When you say assistance, is that assistance of council?

**Ms WARD** — Yes, from council to you.

**Mrs MILL** — Their funding is not devolved to community groups except in situations like on Griffiths Island where they are supporting another organisation to undertake the pest control. We certainly cannot broker direct funding from council to do pest control on their land. We really do not have an expectation that we would do it that way. It is more about pooling our resources together. They might have the money and we might have the people or the contacts, or we might have brokered additional funding from somewhere else to bring the pool together. Council's response to the St Helens project is that they do the bulk of their pest animal control outside of Port Fairy and a few other key locations and that location.

**Ms WARD** — In your presentation you mentioned that the amount of animals is not so much the issue, it is the reduction of the animals, the pests, that you really want to focus on. Do you think that the cameras that you have had installed around private property are one way to see how the population is decreasing? Because it is important to know what is effective and what is not. Is that a way to be able to monitor that?

**Mrs MILL** — Definitely. It is a very cheap way to do it as well. We have had these cameras for four and a half years now. They have been in the field practically constantly. They cost in the order of \$500 or \$600, and they are there 24/7 taking photos of whatever wanders by. In terms of recording over time the pulses of animals coming and going, particularly foxes, you get a really good long-term picture of the success of your program. You also then have a great tool, like the photos I have shown you. I can produce a recent photo, taken within the last fortnight, of a fox from one of my project sites. I can say, 'These are animals that keep coming. They do not go away. The frequency of their visits has got less'.

**Ms WARD** — How many hours a week would you spend looking through camera footage?

**Mrs MILL** — I will reserve my right to parliamentary privilege and say that the monitoring of what the cameras record happens in hours for which I am not paid because I give a damn.

**Ms WARD** — I appreciate that, and thank you for that. It is useful to know how much time you spend so that if it was something that was to continue on elsewhere, we would have an understanding of how it would work and what hours would be involved in actually monitoring it.

**Mrs MILL** — In a farming situation where you have livestock passing in front of the cameras, because you want to see the relationship between the pest animals and the land use — that is quite important —

depending on how frequently that stock wants to pass the camera, I think the most I had in a fortnight, which is two weeks of 24-hour segments on the camera, was 18 000 photos of sheep. I know the landholder's sheep very well, and I like them very much. Within those 18 000 — click, click, click; I have gotten very quick at it — you see things like the fox going by in the background and the sheep ignoring it. At a different time of the year the fox goes by in the background and there are young lambs, and the sheep do not ignore it. Their behaviour changes. If there is a dead lamb in the vicinity of the camera, you know because of the way the fox is behaving. You know how long the fox has been hanging around in an area by whether it is scent marking everything. Does it have mange? Does it have ticks? Does it have a limp?

**Ms WARD** — How many hours are involved in going through 18 000 shots?

**Mrs MILL** — If we worked on a ballpark figure, every 5000 photographs takes approximately 30 minutes.

**Ms WARD** — Okay. That is very good. You have obviously had a lot of practice.

**Mrs MILL** — I am fast, yes. But it is a wonderful engagement tool. What you see and what you learn about all sorts of things harks back to that landscape health. It is not just about pest animals, it is pest animals in the context of the land use that we have got here. If you can get that context by seeing all that comes and goes, you are in a much better position to decide what the best management techniques are and what time of the year to apply them.

**Mr RAMSAY** — You mentioned the K5 derivative of the old calicivirus. It is due to be released, I think, later this year, but did you say you were doing some trials with it around here?

**Mrs MILL** — We applied to have release sites for trials for K5, and two of those sites have been approved.

**Mr RAMSAY** — So you have not actually done an on-ground trial yet, though, with the virus.

**Mrs MILL** — No. We are monitoring for rabbits now in anticipation of a program with the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Training and Resources, which I think is running this, to release K5 virus to particular sites and monitor what happens.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Okay, thank you.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Thank you, Lisette, for coming in. That was great information presented. We are very appreciative of it. If we do have any questions to follow up with, do you mind if we contact you?

**Mrs MILL** — No, not at all. I am easy to track down.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Great. Thank you very much for coming in.

**Witness withdrew.**