

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria**

Melbourne—Tuesday, 23 February 2021

#### **MEMBERS**

Ms Sonja Terpstra—Chair

Mr Clifford Hayes—Deputy Chair

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Cesar Melhem

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Nina Taylor

#### **PARTICIPATING MEMBERS**

Ms Georgie Crozier

Mr David Davis

Dr Tien Kieu

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

**WITNESS**

Ms Lisa Palma, Chief Executive Officer, Wildlife Victoria (*via videoconference*).

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** I declare open the Environment and Planning Committee public hearing for the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the traditional custodians of the various lands which each of us are gathered on today and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings.

I welcome any members of the public watching via the live broadcast.

I would like to acknowledge my colleagues on the committee participating today and thank those who have provided apologies.

To witnesses, all evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, these comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberate false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered contempt of Parliament. All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

If you are appearing remotely, please state your name and organisation one at a time so we can verify your identity on screen. Lisa, could you state your name, please, and your organisation?

**Ms PALMA:** Yes. I am Lisa Palma, CEO of Wildlife Victoria.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you. We welcome your opening comments but ask that they be kept to a maximum of 10 minutes to ensure we have plenty of time for discussion. Could I please remind members and witnesses to mute their microphones when not speaking to minimise interference. I should just introduce myself. I am Clifford Hayes. I am the Deputy Chair of the committee, and I am chairing today. I have Dr Samantha Ratnam here with me, Ms Melina Bath, Mr Andy Meddick and Dr Matthew Bach here in person. We have got Mr Stuart Grimley online by Zoom. Lisa, if you would like to start, that would be great.

**Ms PALMA:** Sure. Good morning, everyone. Ecosystem decline is having a direct impact on our native species. As the Wildlife Victoria submission states, in our role in providing a wildlife emergency response rescue service to the Victorian community, this is something we see the impact of every day. We are in a unique position at Wildlife Victoria to have data going back several years demonstrating that, and I would actually like to share some of this data with the inquiry today.

We contend that ecosystem decline is a direct result of human activity, such as habitat destruction, and every year thousands of native species in Victoria become sick, injured and orphaned, typically as a result of this human activity. For the period 2015–2020, calls into the Wildlife Victoria emergency response service for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife increased by 88 per cent. Wildlife Victoria has been in existence for more than 30 years and since 2015 we have seen call volumes increase 14 per cent year on year on average, and this is in the context of no increase in spend on marketing, branding or advertising during this period to raise brand awareness and explain this increase. In 2015 we received over 47 000 calls per year and now this is close to 89 000. Members of the public calling in to the Wildlife Victoria emergency response service seeking help for wildlife, and an increase in calls accordingly, demonstrates that wildlife welfare issues are of increasing concern to the Victorian community.

Two ecosystem issues—habitat loss and an increase in temperature—and their impact on native species have been starkly evident at Wildlife Victoria. Let us consider three species: the first, the koala. We know that koalas are substantially impacted by habitat decline in Victoria. Between 2013 and 2020 there was an 82 per cent

increase in koalas reported in to our emergency response service. The number of koalas reported in to our emergency response service as a result of habitat loss has also increased year on year. In 2013, 59 per cent of total koalas reported into our emergency response service were as a result of habitat destruction, and that has risen to 70 per cent of total koalas in 2020, and that number has in fact been as high as 73 per cent. We are now getting close to 900 koalas reported into our service in total per annum.

Secondly, ringtail possums and grey-headed flying foxes are species that are substantially impacted by increasing temperatures and heat stress. Between 2013 and 2020 there was a 91 per cent increase in ringtail possums reported into our emergency response service and a 33 per cent increase in grey-headed flying foxes. In the extreme heat experienced in the summer of 2019–20 we estimate that a minimum—a minimum—of 10 per cent of the total grey-headed flying fox population in Victoria perished due to heat stress. At least 10 000 animals died, with 5000 dying in one day alone at the Yarra Bend colony in Kew due to heat stress. From 2016 to the end of 2020 Wildlife Victoria has mapped five major heat stress events which saw a significant spike in requests for help for these species in particular. There is a direct strong positive correlation between extreme heat and calls in to the Wildlife Victoria emergency response service for species vulnerable to increasing temperatures and heat stress.

In summary, these statistics do prove that our wildlife is under threat in Victoria. Because of the increased ecosystem threats our wildlife should be afforded appropriate protection. Wildlife play an important role in their contribution to ecological balance. Their loss or substantial reduction can have a significant detrimental flow-on effect on the ecosystem. Our Australian wildlife lived in harmony in a balanced ecosystem well before introduced human intervention. The Wildlife Victoria submission focuses on both habitat destruction and the killing of wildlife. I am going to comment on the killing of wildlife in particular. Wildlife are under assault from a range of sources, both from permitted and currently legal killing and, very disturbingly, illegal killing.

I am going to focus on illegal killing first. The Wildlife Victoria submission listed nine examples of the legal killing of wildlife since 2013 when no perpetrators had been charged. This is only scratching the surface. In the last 60 days, and as recently as yesterday, Wildlife Victoria has had 28 cruelty cases reported into our emergency response service. That is approximately one cruelty case every two days. Many of these cases cover multiple animals and demonstrate wanton and horrific killing and torture of our native species. This is unacceptable. It is deeply traumatising for my staff, deeply traumatising for the members of the public who report the cruelty into our service and deeply traumatising for our wildlife rescue volunteers who need to attend to the animal, and the pain and suffering inflicted on our native animals is absolutely horrific and heartbreaking and chilling to contemplate.

Wildlife Victoria welcomes the introduction of the Office of the Conservation Regulator, but the Office of the Conservation Regulator is insufficiently resourced to deal with each individual instance of wildlife crime in a timely manner, and the penalties are insufficient. I know that there will be no, or delayed, action on the majority of the cases that we individually report into the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

I will move next to legal killing of wildlife. I have provided the statistical evidence of impacts on wildlife due to ecosystem decline, as reported in to the Wildlife Victoria emergency response service, as well as wildlife crime that is occurring. To be overlaid on top of this is the legal and endorsed killing of wildlife by the Victorian government. This includes a so-called, lethal ‘authority to control wildlife systems’ where, between 2009 and 2019, permits were issued for the destruction of 1 702 372 healthy native animals and birds. Another example of legal killing includes the annual duck shooting season, which represents legalised killing of otherwise protected wildlife for recreational purposes. This is extraordinary.

So what is needed? Wildlife Victoria would like to see an end-to-end review of the *Wildlife Act*, including increased penalties for breaches, and we welcome the opportunity to provide input into this. We would like to see more resources directed into ecosystem impacts at the operational level, including the establishment of an independent and properly resourced wildlife crime investigation unit to respond to, investigate and prosecute matters as there is a desperate need to respond to incidents. Wildlife Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation, a charity, and we have no formal or legislative role or powers and no formalised operations role to play in responding to wildlife incidents, despite having over 30 years expertise in wildlife emergency management and being the largest and leading wildlife rescue organisation in the state. There is scope and opportunity to provide statutory authority status to Wildlife Victoria with the appropriate funding and incorporate the expertise and experience we have at our disposal into broader emergency management and wildlife management response.

We know that demand for our services from the public is going to continue to increase and we know government is stretched in its ability to respond.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thanks. Thanks very much, Lisa. I will just ask some committee members to ask Ms Palma questions. I would like to remind committee members, although they may want to make a statement in their question, to please keep their questioning time short so we can get around everyone. I might start off with the committee, and I will come to asking a couple of questions at the end myself. But I will start with Mr Meddick.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Thank you, Deputy Chair, and thank you, Ms Palma, for presenting today. I have read through your submission. It is quite extensive and to the point, and I thank you also for your presentation this morning. You have raised a number of issues that certainly have been raised by others, but perhaps not so eloquently as you have done there. I just want to ask a couple of questions in terms of the conservation regulator and where you see those shortfalls in that office and the reason why you are calling for what is basically an independent office of animal protection. There are others—the party I represent notwithstanding—that have called for an overarching animal protection independent authority, but you are looking for one significantly just for wildlife.

Look, the shortfalls—do you see them in that the regulator has no really overarching powers of prosecution? They can only make recommendations that they go up the path, and that is partly because it sits under the DELWP process. Do you see that there needs to be a complete separation from the DELWP process because for DELWP, as a behemoth of an organisation, investigation and prosecution of wildlife incidences really has just become somewhat of a minor thing? Is that where you see that?

**Ms PALMA:** Thanks for the question. The first point I would make is that in my role and for my team as well we have a very close working relationship with DELWP. There are two points I would make with regard to that. The first is the point on independence. The primary body that is accountable for management of the *Wildlife Act* is the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. That includes two things where there is a fundamental conflict of interest. The first is that that department is accountable for protecting wildlife and prosecuting and investigating wildlife crime but is also the department that issues licences to kill wildlife. So an independent wildlife crime investigation unit would narrow focus and remove that conflict of interest. The second point I would make is, in my observation, there are some very dedicated officers that work in the department and at the OCR, but for the level of wildlife crime that we are seeing come through it is apparent to me that resources are quite limited. So an independent wildlife crime investigation unit that is appropriately resourced with enough officers to investigate and prosecute these crimes, I think, is what is needed.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Do you see them not just looking into perhaps wildlife crime but either them or the conservation regulator having overarching powers in situations like, for instance, approving planning permits in housing estates and intensive farming situations where wildlife would be so adversely impacted? I take the point that it seems like effluent run-off from intensive farming going into fresh waterways—we are seeing that happen quite a bit across Victoria now. In particular I am concerned about the situation where the platypus was very recently elevated to ‘threatened species’, and Victoria is one of the few places left where platypus still exist in some form in reasonable family situations. So do you see that either the conservation regulator or this independent office would have or should have an ability to have input that is regulatory in nature and therefore overarching in those processes?

**Ms PALMA:** Yes, I think that would be a good thing. I think what is missing in my observation is a holistic approach to wildlife welfare. If we look at the end-to-end set of activities associated with wildlife welfare, Wildlife Victoria play a role in rescue and capture, which is very much at the reactive end, but there are a range of other issues like some of the ones you have mentioned and also further up the chain the conservation of habitat. So a lot of these issues that impact our wildlife are managed across multiple departments and multiple organisations. So I think one body with central accountability, authority, taking a holistic view end to end would absolutely be welcomed.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Thank you, Ms Palma. Thank you, Deputy Chair.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thanks, Mr Meddick. I might go to Dr Bach next.

**Dr BACH:** I will wait, if that is all right, Deputy Chair, until after some other colleagues have had a chance, in particular Ms Bath.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Okay, all right. We will go to Ms Bath then.

**Ms BATH:** Thank you. There is a segue. Thank you very much, Ms Palma, for your presentation. I have got a number of questions, but I will just start off with a couple. I was interested in your commentary—and very true commentary—about habitat destruction and in relation to heat stress, and I guess nowhere have we seen heat stress more than in the fires of 2019–20, where there was 1.6 million hectares of land loss. A short comment: it was very challenging for wildlife officers who had to go and euthanise vast numbers of animals. I am interested to understand the role that you played in capture and rescue there but also the extent of the loss of those native species resulting from those fires.

**Ms PALMA:** Thank you for the question. Wildlife Victoria played limited to no role in rescue and capture during the 2019–20 bushfires. That was deeply distressing and disturbing to our extensive, highly skilled statewide network of wildlife rescue volunteers who wanted to help but were unable to do so. The point that I made about recognition of the services provided in a more formalised sense at the operational level was not there last year; it is still not there. I feel that there was a missed opportunity for the Victorian government to utilise the resources of the nearly 1000 skilled rescue volunteers that we have with Wildlife Victoria to get in and help. So the role we played was quite limited. The role Wildlife Victoria did play was more after the event. We provided substantial financial support and immediate on-the-ground support to wildlife shelters that were impacted as a result of the fires—predominantly financial support. In terms of the number of animals impacted, we know holistically that it was at least a billion animals. I do not have any scientific data or research, not being a scientist, on the actual number other than the fact that it was absolutely significant.

**Ms BATH:** Deputy Chair, I have a quick supplementary and then one other. I will be quick. Ms Palma, did the government give you any reason why they did not include you in rescue? Was it because you were not qualified? What was their reasoning? You said you were not allowed to. Why was that?

**Ms PALMA:** I do not know.

**Ms BATH:** Okay. Deputy Chair, thank you. Mr Meddick brought up an important point about the platypus being elevated to the threatened species level, yet we have just passed a Bill for camping on those Crown river frontages, and many people who live on the rivers—and I will say licensees as well—are concerned about the potential destruction of those habitats that are in fairly good nick at the moment. What role do you see that you would like to play in the conversation to be had around this planning?

**Ms PALMA:** We would like to be involved in the conversation. Again, looking at Wildlife Victoria's core expertise and the value that we can provide, it is around public engagement, it is around rescue and capture, so our input would be along those lines. We do not get many platypuses called into our service per annum—they are quite an elusive animal and obviously there are not many left. Certainly we would like to have a voice around getting the issues into the public domain and engaging with the significant numbers of the community that call into our service each year.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you, Lisa. Dr Ratnam.

**Dr RATNAM:** Thank you, Deputy Chair. Thank you, Ms Palma, for your excellent presentation. Firstly, thank you for the work that Wildlife Victoria and your team of volunteers undertake. I know it is very tough and distressing work, as you have alluded to, and the compassion that your team of people show is so critically valuable for this state. Thanks for the detailed submission and presentation. For the benefit of the committee, who may be unaware of how Victorian law currently allows large numbers of native animals to be killed under the *Wildlife Act*, can you explain how the authority-to-kill-wildlife permit system works and what impact this is having on wildlife?

**Ms PALMA:** Yes. As I understand it, the authority-to-control-wildlife system works typically where a landholder or otherwise will contact the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and apply for a permit for wildlife to be killed or controlled, or something like that, where that landholder perceives the native species to be a pest. That would include things ranging from birds on golf courses, flying foxes going into orchards and eastern grey kangaroos grazing on properties. My understanding is that a permit can be applied

for, that is assessed by the department and then the department will make the appropriate permit available where the landholder satisfies certain criteria.

**Dr RATNAM:** Great. Thank you very much. You have also spoken about key events as a driver of wildlife welfare issues. You talked about in your submission the two aspects of habitat destruction and the killing of wildlife. I am asking if you could expand a bit more about what you think the impact of habitat destruction is on wildlife.

**Ms PALMA:** Yes. So the first point with habitat destruction is our animals are reliant on native habitat both for food and as a place to live. So a lot of our species, like koalas, possums and others, live in trees and they feed and eat from native vegetation. I will speak about the grey-headed flying fox, because that is a fairly stark example. The grey-headed flying fox is in fact a threatened species. It is our only long-range pollinator, so the grey-headed flying fox is integral to the health of our eucalypt forests because they spread and disperse and feed on native blossoms—flowering gum et cetera. So where we see substantial masses of flowering gum that are either cut down or burnt or whatever it might be—so the habitat has gone—obviously that means that there is a massive impact on the primary food source for that species.

We see in our emergency response service obviously trends in species, and we overlay the weather onto that, but an interesting situation that has recently occurred is we now have the state's largest grey-headed flying fox population residing in Sale. That is unexpected, it is the first time it has happened, and we were both alarmed and very surprised to see that. That could be a function of the fact that a large mass of the species' habitat is now gone. I do not know the answer as to why, but what I can report on is what we see from an outcome perspective. So that is probably one example of where habitat destruction has had a significant impact.

**Dr RATNAM:** Thank you. I have a couple more. I can come back.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Okay. Mr Grimley, would you like to ask a question?

**Mr GRIMLEY:** Thanks, Deputy Chair. And thanks, Ms Palma, for your presentation. I have a question in relation to the cruelty cases that have been reported to the call centre that you spoke about. Can you just explain to the committee the process from when a call comes into the call centre and what happens from there?

**Ms PALMA:** Yes, sure. Members of the community will typically ring Wildlife Victoria first, and often we will get a call. So my team will get a call as the wildlife crime is actually playing out, and they are calling us distressed and concerned. They are also calling us because they are reporting in what they are seeing as an injured animal. We, accordingly, will take all of the details in the same way as 000 would for wildlife—you know, caller's name, address, mobile number, description of the situation. We will take extensive notes. We will also ask the caller to send us photos, so we can attach them to the case. All of the case details are lodged in our CRM system. What we will then do depends on the situation, but if an animal is injured and needs urgent attention, we will dispatch a trained wildlife rescue volunteer. We may dispatch the police or even a trained wildlife vet. It just depends on the situation. And our focus—again we are at the rescue end, so we will go to alleviate and assist and support that animal.

My team will then immediately contact the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning via email. Our internal protocol is that all wildlife cruelty cases are escalated to myself as the CEO, and accordingly the department will take over the investigation from there. For situations that are playing out that may involve multiple animals, I may also contact the Office of the Conservation Regulator directly to let them know we have got an urgent issue playing out. Our rescuers understand and know that where there is wildlife crime it is important for the scene to be preserved and they are not to interfere, but again our focus is on supporting the animal. Once the cruelty matter has been referred to the department, we are not privy to any details of the ongoing investigation for various reasons, and we continue on with our job.

**Mr GRIMLEY:** Just on that, does the caller then have the right to contact the department just to see the status of an investigation, similar to how the victim of a crime, I suppose, can contact the police?

**Ms PALMA:** I believe so, and in fact members of the public can lodge cases themselves; they do not have to come through us. It has now become the norm for a lot of the public to contact us directly, so we will often lodge the case, but we do need to provide the department with the member of the public's details, because they will often contact them to get further information. I do not know what proportion of total cases that go into the

department come from Wildlife Victoria. I know there will also be other cases where the community will contact the department directly.

**Mr GRIMLEY:** Okay. Thank you. And just one more quick question, if I can, Deputy Chair. You spoke about the increase to the penalties under the *Wildlife Act*. What penalties do you consider to be appropriate in these circumstances?

**Ms PALMA:** I believe that our native species are sentient creatures and torture is unacceptable. In my mind torturing and killing an animal and putting that animal through horrific pain is not dissimilar to doing that to a human. So I would really, really, really like to see very serious jail time for these sorts of crimes. I would like to see greater vigilance in monitoring to ensure our wildlife are safe, and I would like to see crippling penalties applied. Really, fundamentally, the penalties applied should serve to deter the offender and stop them doing it again.

**Mr GRIMLEY:** Wonderful. Thank you, Ms Palma. Thanks, Deputy Chair.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thanks very much. Thanks, Lisa. Dr Bach, would you like to ask a question?

**Dr BACH:** Yes. Thanks, Deputy Chair. I would add my thanks also to you, Ms Palma, for both your written commentary and also what you have presented to us this morning. I have been particularly interested to hear from you regarding the various threats that our native species face. I have heard the statistics before that you used regarding the level of destruction of our native species at the time of the dreadful bushfires of 2019–20—a billion—but it still shocks me every time I hear it. I would not mind asking you about some other threats. You have spoke about a range of threats, but I am particularly interested to learn more from you about the threat from invasive species. I wonder if you might speak with us a little bit from your expertise and the viewpoint of your organisation about, for example, threats from things like dog attacks and pig attacks and also competition for food.

**Ms PALMA:** Yes, sure. That is a good question. The numbers that I have presented to you this morning are very conservative. How the process works from our end is we have a series of categories that we attach cases to based on the calls coming in, so the statistics I provided you with this morning excluded animals hit by cars. Now, arguably a koala in the middle of the road hit by a car may have lost its home, so I excluded those statistics. We also have statistics on dog attacks, cat attacks and other categories. I do not have the statistics in front of me on the numbers that we get called in for dog and cat attacks, other than to tell you that it is a very, very regular occurrence. With regard to data on feral species such as foxes, rabbits et cetera, that is not something that we see a lot of. Again, I think it exists, but we do not have the data on that, so I cannot really provide commentary on that point.

**Dr BACH:** All right. Thank you.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you. Thanks, Ms Palma. I might ask a couple of questions in that case. I want to have more of an overview idea of things. You talked particularly about heat stress and the effect that has had on wildlife, and we have been seeing increasing average temperatures over the last 20 or so years. With global warming we are going to see more and more temperature rises in the future. What is the best action we could take to protect animals from heat stress?

**Ms PALMA:** That is a big question. It would be addressing the core factors that are introduced by humans or caused by humans to cause a temperature increase, and there will be a range of scientific opinions on what is leading to increased temperatures. Certainly a very quick, easy and impactful thing that we could do is habitat restoration—plant more trees and plant more native species would be my initial response, so again, you know, at Wildlife Victoria we are seeing the end impacts of these things, we are seeing the end impacts of heat stress, the end impacts of dog attacks, the end impacts of a range of things. In the perfect world we would get no calls at all. Heat stress is a big, big issue for us. We do need to do something to protect our species from increasing temperatures. The numbers of animals that I quoted that are coming into us that are particularly susceptible to heat stress—the numbers are alarming, they are not going down, they are continuing to increase. There may be an immediate piece of work to do around identifying the species most at risk, what are the core factors that are causing that and what we can do to implement change quickly, but in my mind, the number one priority for us would be habitat restoration.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Terrific. Thank you. Another question more on the big picture type of things, you talk about in your submission the demand on resources, such as expansion of agriculture and development into habitat areas. Looking at the sort of economy we run, which is being encouraged, a high-growth economy where humans seem to be doing very well in numbers and animals are going down in numbers—over the last 50 years we have doubled the population of Victoria and we seek to redouble it in the next 20 or 30 years. Could you expand on what you see and how we will be able to cope with this plan to expand both economy and numbers into the future and how we can respond?

**Ms PALMA:** Yes, sure. That is absolutely the case, that the human species is absolutely increasing. I think that there is a wonderful opportunity here for humans to live in harmony with wildlife. The historical approach to wildlife entering the space of humans is to perceive the wildlife as a threat and to kill them. That does not need to happen. I think there is an enormous opportunity for us to encourage landholders, for example, even in the city and suburbia, to plant native gardens—to plant species of flowering wattle and flowering gum, all sorts of things—to attract native birds et cetera. There is a real opportunity for the general public to be better educated about the importance of wildlife and how special they are and how unique they are and how to live with them. We get a number of calls each year about people complaining about possums living in their backyards. Possums are a native species. I personally worry about the ringtail possum, which is perceived as a common species. Is it the extinct species of the future? Humans and our native species can live in harmony, and I think that there is an enormous opportunity there for us to look at that both in the country and in the city.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Terrific. All right. Thanks very much, Ms Palma. Has anyone else got a follow-up? Dr Meddick—Mr Meddick?

**Ms BATH:** We are all doctors.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** We are all doctors, yes.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Thank you, Deputy Chair, for that elevation in my status. I much appreciate that. I just wanted to ask a final question and come back to a point that you made earlier on about habitat restoration. We increasingly see destruction of habitat rather than restoration, and there are a number of different pressures or demands from the human population. Some of that is for forestry products, for housing et cetera, et cetera. Some of that is for farmland, for either crop use or for animal use. That destruction of habitat often leads to that legal killing of wildlife that you spoke about earlier because they are seen to be in competition with other animals for instance—ones that we use in a farming setting—and therefore they are perhaps relegated in terms of importance. Is that a fair call?

**Ms PALMA:** Yes, I think that is a fairly accurate representation, absolutely.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Thank you.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** All right. I think that pretty well brings us to the end of this session. Thank you very much, Ms Palma. It has been a pleasure. Thank you for your submission and for giving evidence here today.

**Ms PALMA:** Thank you for the opportunity.

**Witness withdrew.**