

Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre

MEDIA RELEASE

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New law creates springboard for feral animal problems

The new *NSW Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill 2009* runs the risk of increasing Australia's feral animal populations.

The Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre (IA CRC) is concerned with the new provision for game reserves to be established in NSW, where invasive game animals — many of which have been assessed by the national Vertebrate Pests Committee as 'extreme' risks — can be 'housed' and birds can be 'released' for private hunting.

"Game reserves could act as a potential springboard for invasive species. Some of the animals listed in the Bill are not established in Australia and are even listed as 'high risk species' in other jurisdictions. The biosecurity chain is only as strong as its weakest link and game reserves are set to be NSW's weakest biosecurity link," said Professor Tony Peacock, Chief Executive Officer of the IA CRC.

The Bobwhite quail, for example, is prohibited in Western Australia. It is well suited to mixed habitats and known to compete with species of native quail, yet it is included in the proposed list.

"I'm somewhat flummoxed that we're still having this debate 150 years after the 'innocent' proposal to bring rabbits to Australia. The rabbit has now become one of the most destructive invasive pests in Australia. The English gentleman responsible actually said at the time: 'The introduction of a few rabbits could do little harm and might provide a touch of home, in addition to a spot of hunting'," said Professor Peacock.

The Bill also appears to conflict with the NSW Invasive Species Plan, the first goal of which is to prevent the establishment of new invasive species. The plan states: 'The most effective way to minimise the impacts of invasive species is to prevent their initial incursion'.

Other species, such as feral spotted turtle doves, are already found in NSW and illustrate the risk of numbers of feral animals exploding. They first became established in Alice Springs in the early 1990s when just 10 birds were liberated from a backyard aviary. Since then, the population has steadily grown and today numbers are thought to exceed 8000 birds.

"Expanding the list could open a floodgate for possible establishment of problem animals. The biosecurity of the environment is a concern not only for the sake of Australia's environmental assets, but also because of the scope for wild animals and plants to act as a reservoir for pests and diseases that have broader effects," said Professor Peacock.

"There's a pretty basic cause and effect scenario that's likely to result. By including these animals in the Act, there is an incentive to introduce populations that will create a new springboard for invasive animal problems," he said.





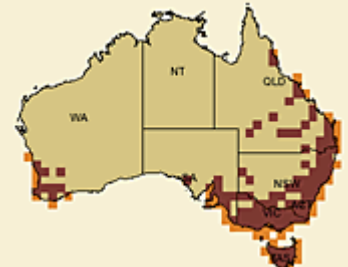
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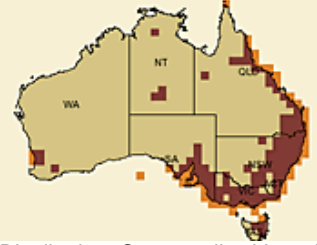
MORE INFORMATION:

Table identifying selected species from the Bill against risk assessment results (follows)
[Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill 2009](#)

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The following table depicts selected proposed non-indigenous species included in the *Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill 2009*, against the threat category assessment as per the Vertebrate Pests Committee 2006 '*List of Exotic Vertebrate Animals in Australia*' and the establishment risk rank from Bomford 2008 '*Risk assessment models for establishment of exotic vertebrates in Australia and New Zealand*'. Current known distributions and potential impacts have been extracted from available resources.

Proposed non-indigenous species within the Bill		Establishment risk rank (Bomford 2008) (2)	Threat Category (Vertebrate Pests Committee 2006) (1)	Current known distribution	Potential Impacts		
Common name	Scientific Name				Social	Agricultural	Environmental
	<i>Colinus virginianus</i>	Extreme	Extreme	It is very likely that this quail would become established in the wild in Western Australia. (Department of Agriculture and Food, WA)	The cock bird's call may upset neighbours particularly in the early morning (Department of Conservation, WA)	Well suited to the mixed habitats of small farms (primarily in peri-urban areas). Flying quail (can reach speeds of 110km/hr) (Department of Conservation, WA)	Competes with species of native quail. The Bobwhite quail will use a perch at night to roost. This can cause problems during finch nesting season if the quail lands on a finch nest. (Department of Conservation, WA)
	<i>Lophortyx callipepla californicus</i>	Extreme	Extreme	Located at King and Norfolk Islands. (Department of Agriculture and Food, WA)	Loud distinctive cackle may cause noise disturbance to local residents. (Long, J.L. (1981). <i>Introduced Birds of the World</i> . Reed Books, Sydney)	Reported to damage grape and strawberry crops and germinating clover seed and other grain crops. (Birds Australia)	Competes with species of native quail. The quail will use a perch at night to roost. This can cause problems during finch nesting season if the quail lands on a finch nest. (Department of Conservation, WA)
	<i>Numida meleagris</i>	Moderate	Extreme		Noisy birds, not well suited to a suburban location (Birds Australia)	Aggressive to other birds, particularly chickens. (Birds Australia)	Aggressive to other birds (Birds Australia)
	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Moderate	Serious	 <p>Distribution map of <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> Map © Birds Australia Birdata</p>	The mallard is an adaptable species and is highly tolerant of humans, using artificial water sources and being able to nest in artificial structures such as haystacks and buildings. Defecation can affect public enjoyment of parks and public areas. (Birds Australia)	Mallards have benefited from agricultural developments that provide wetlands, pastures and other suitable habitats. (Birds Australia)	Competes with native birds: The buildup of mallard and mallard-black duck hybrid populations in Australia has caused concern for the conservation of the black duck. (CSIRO)
Partridge	<i>Alectoris alectorica chukar</i>	<i>Alectoris graecia</i> : extreme	Extreme	Partridges have been widely introduced throughout the world. Their introductions and associated	are susceptible to several avian diseases and might		

				<p>management for sport hunting have the potential to affect native ecosystems in a variety of ways. (Birds Australia)</p>	<p>act as a vector for infections that can be passed from avian hosts to humans, such as <i>Chlamydia</i>, when raised in game-farming situations (Christensen 1996; Erbeck and Nunn 1999).</p>		
<p>Pheasant</p> 	<p><i>Phasianus phasianus colchicus</i></p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Extreme</p>		<p>Pheasants tend to squawk during the breeding season. This may upset local residents. Males are aggressive and can attack people with their sharp spurs.</p>	<p>Pheasants were liberated in California from 1889 on, but only became well established with the development of irrigated grain crops. Rice especially seemed to create favourable pheasant habitat, and the development of large-scale rice agriculture... stimulated a virtual explosion of the pheasant population. (Leopold, 1985)</p>	<p>Pheasants need access to live protein (mealworms or clean maggots) as inadequate protein may exacerbate their tendency to cannibalism. They may also be likely to eat other bird species.</p> <p>Pheasants are also prone to eye infections and worms creating the possibility of a health issue if they are in sufficient numbers.</p>
<p>Spotted Dove</p> 	<p><i>Streptopelia chinensis</i></p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Extreme</p>	 <p>Distribution: <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i> Map © Birds Australia Birdata The spotted dove is native to eastern Asia. It was introduced into Australia in the mid-1800's and early 1900's and rapidly became established. It is now common throughout eastern Australia, particularly in major towns and cities in southern and south-western Australia. Within the Northern Territory, the spotted turtle-dove is located in Alice Springs. Feral spotted doves first became established in Alice Springs in the early 1990s when approximately 10 birds were liberated from a backyard aviary. Since that time, the population has steadily grown and today numbers are thought to exceed 8000 birds (Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, NT)</p>	<p>Feral doves can be a nuisance around aviaries, fowl yards and pet feeding areas, where they scrounge for scraps and other food items. High concentrations of droppings deposited around these sites not only increase cleaning chores, but may pose a health hazard. Feral doves can be very noisy and disruptive with their constant 'cooing'. (Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, NT)</p>	<p>Spotted doves may also carry parasites and disease that may threaten farmed bird industries. (Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, NT)</p>	<p>Spotted doves are of concern in the Northern Territory because they compete with native species for food and habitat. (Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, NT)</p>

(1) Threat category key (VPC 2006)

E – Extreme Threat Category

These animals should not be allowed to enter, nor be kept in any state or territory. (Special consideration may be given to scientific institutions on a case-by-case basis.) Any species that has not been assessed previously should be considered to be in the Extreme Threat Category and should be treated accordingly, until a risk assessment is conducted.

S – Serious Threat Category

These animals may be introduced and/or should be kept only in collections approved by the relevant state/territory authority as being primarily kept for (1) public display and education purposes, and/or for (2) genuine scientific research approved by the relevant state/territory authority, and as meeting best practice for the purposes of keeping the species concerned.

M – Moderate Threat Category

These animals should be restricted to collections approved and registered by the relevant state/territory authority for the keeping of Moderate Threat Species. States/territories may continue to impose any additional restrictions on acquisition and keeping of Moderate Threat Species.

L – Low Threat Category

Animals which, relative to other species, have a low risk of becoming a problem for the environment, primary industry or public safety.

Vertebrate Pests Committee (2006) '*List of Exotic Vertebrate Animals in Australia 2006*'

http://www.feral.org.au/feral_documents/VPCListJan06.pdf

(2) Establishment Risk Rank key (Bomford 2008)

There are four key factors for which there is strong evidence of a correlation with establishment success. These results were used to develop and refine models to calculate the establishment risk of exotic species. The four factors are:

1. Propagule pressure — the release of large numbers of animals at different times and places enhances the chance of successful establishment.
2. Climate match — exotic species have a greater chance of establishing if they are introduced to an area with a climate that closely matches that of their original range.
3. History of establishment elsewhere — a history of previous successful establishment is a strong predictor for all vertebrate taxa.
4. Taxonomic group — species that belong to families and genera that have high establishment success are more likely to be successful than other species, all else being equal.

Bomford, M (2008) Risk assessment models for establishment of exotic vertebrates in Australia and New Zealand, Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre, Canberra

<http://www.invasiveanimals.com/publications/downloads/Risk-Assessment-Models-report-FINAL.pdf>