

AWMS POSITION STATEMENT

Bounties

Background

Bounties, whereby financial incentives are offered to destroy pest animals, are often considered as a solution to pest animal management. The purported aim of bounties is to reduce pest numbers and encourage many people to become involved in pest control. However, reviews of bounty schemes around the world indicate that they are an ineffective form of pest animal control (e.g. Allen and Sparkes 2001, Fairbridge and Marks 2005), and bounty schemes are ecologically and socially flawed for several reasons:

- Bounty schemes rarely achieve the required reduction in pest population numbers that is necessary to reduce their impacts.
- To collect a bounty, hunters are required to present a nominated body part (such as a scalp or tail). This practice is not only open to fraudulent practices, but encourages the use of inefficient (and sometimes inhumane) methods. More importantly, bounty schemes impede the implementation of more efficacious and cost-effective methods of control by directing funding away from them or, in worst cases, blocking the use of alternative, more effective control tools.
- Most successful pest control requires that those with the problem and those who will benefit from control own the problem and be intimately involved in undertaking the management. This is not always the case with bounty programs, which can be undertaken by those with little interest in the problem or those whose aim is to maximise bounty profits.
- Bounties can create a source of income that does little to encourage the long-term control or permanent reduction in the targeted pest species population. Counter to the objective of pest population reductions, bounties can lead to sustained yield harvesting, which encourages persistence of pest populations.
- Bounty programmes are prone to selective harvesting (preferentially removing the younger, more naive animals, and leaving the mature animals to breed and ensure a future stock).
- Bounty hunters often concentrate their effort in areas where they get the greatest return for their effort. This may not necessarily be where pests are causing significant damage.
- Control using bounties rarely results in a reduction of the population to a desired target level because of the lack of direction and control of the hunting effort being implemented.

Although intuitively bounties seem capable of offering positive benefit-cost ratios, in practice bounty schemes are an inefficient and costly pest animal management tool that require considerable supervision, are subject to fraud, and do not guarantee improved pest control that results in a significant reduction in pest animal damage.

Other forms of financial incentives may assist pest management. For example, operators were financially rewarded through a bonus incentive scheme for each day ahead of the program date that they eradicated coypu (*Myocaster coypus*; a rodent) in England (Gosling 1989). Also, subsidies provided by landholders to commercial operators allowed the harvest of goats to continue after the time when cost of mustering outweighed the return from the sale of the harvested goats. Potentially, financial rewards for removal of more pest animals than the measurable goal of a particular strategic plan, or the last few pest animals in an

eradication zone, could be effective, because the incentive is directed towards a specific action and outcome.

Based on the above, THE AUSTRALASIAN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT SOCIETY:

ACKNOWLEDGES that bounties offer what appears to be a simple solution to pest animal problems by providing financial rewards to undertake control;

RECOGNISES that bounty systems are flawed and do not deliver long-term solutions to pest animal problems

Is CONCERNED that bounties are often implemented with political motivations despite scientific advice to the contrary;

SUPPORTS the concept of best-practice pest animal management which:

- Is based on the principles that underpin effective pest management (Braysher 2017);
- Adopts a strategic approach to pest management (Braysher 1993, Braysher 2017).

Accordingly, AWMS recommends that:

1. Bounty schemes not be used for managing the damage due to pest animals
2. Best practice approaches to management are adopted based on ownership of the problem and the solution by those that will benefit from effective pest management.

References

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