



From Feral to Dollar – The Australian Government’s solution to non-native camels

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Introduction

Travel, trade and settlement has allowed for the introduction and spread of non-native species across the Globe. With this came economic impacts for humans, especially within the agricultural industries. However, an aspect which is mostly overlooked is the impact on the non-native animals who become known as “pests”, “feral” or “noxious animals” bringing with it harmful legislation.



The traditional control methods available for non-native animals in Australia are divided into conventional control techniques and biological control. Conventional control methods for non-native animals include trapping, baiting, fencing and shooting. While Biological methods includes poisons, natural predators, parasites, disease-carrying bacteria or viruses.¹ It has been suggested by Thiriet that there might be millions of non-native animals killed by those methods on the basis of several published reports².

¹ <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive-species/feral-animals-australia>

² Thiriet, D (2007) In the spotlight – the welfare of introduced wild animals in Australia *Environmental and Planning Law Journal*, 24(6). pp. 417-426.

Although the primary forms of camel control are trapping at water points, gathering, shooting and aerial culling, there are emerging industries around the camel based on the need to control a “feral” animal. Those include game meat, camel dairy, live export and for use in the tourist industry. This essay looks at some of the welfare legislation behind the commercialisation of non-native camels and asks the rhetorical question whether commercialisation causes more welfare issues for the introduced species. It focuses on the four States of Australia where camels exist: Western Australia (WA), Queensland (Qld), Northern Territory (NT) and South Australia (SA).

While invasive animals are mostly referred to as “pests”, or “feral” within legislation, this essay uses the term ‘non-native’ animal to refer to the introduced vertebrate animals unless referenced specifically within the context of legislation.

Development

The one-humped dromedary camel (*Camelus dromedarius*) was introduced to Australia in 1840. Between 1880-1907, up to 20,000 Camels were brought in from India to aid in the exploration of the Australian outback³. The introduced camels were released into the wild after the motor vehicle became common in remote areas in the 1920s and 1930s. According to the Western Australian Department of Agriculture, there are now an estimate of 300,000 feral camels in Australia, focused mainly WA, Qld, NT and SA; making it the most substantial feral camel population in the world⁴.

Under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999(Cth)*⁵, a number of “feral” animals are recognised as threats to native animals and plants. In 2007, Camels were declared as “pests of agriculture” in WA under the provisions of the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007(WA)*⁶. The main damage associated with the camel, according to the Department of Environment and Energy, includes the destruction of fences and water points. They are also allegedly aggressive towards sheep and cattle while competing for their feed and water⁷.

³ http://www.nintione.com.au/resource/ManagingImpactsFeralCamels_FinalReportAFCMP.pdf

⁴ <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/pest-mammals/feral-camel>

⁵ <http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc>

⁶ [<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/pest-mammals/feral-camel>]

⁷ <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive-species/feral-animals-australia>]

A 2004 study by Ross McLeod for the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Pest Animal Control [McLeod 2004]⁸ was a starting point for documenting the impact of non-native “pest” animals in Australia. According to the CRC, there has been very little information on the overall impact of “pest” species on the Australian economy, environment and society. According to the report, research into camel dietary preferences has shown that camels spend up to 97% of their grazing time feeding on shrubs and forbs and therefore have different dietary preferences to cattle and therefore can co-graze⁹. The economic impact of camels as a “pest” in Australia is minimal [McLeod 2004] and amounts to 0.05% of the total economic impact of total species declared as pests¹⁰.

The camel industry has been emerging since the early 1980s, based on wild camels and not on the development of a domesticated population. Recommendations however put forward by the committee of Australian Feral Camel Management Project committee supported by the Australian Government in 2010, included a reduction of industry’s reliance on feral camels and building captive herds to improve the reliability and quality of supply to abattoirs¹¹.

The camel industries include domestic and international trade. Internationally, camels are live exported to the middle East and Asia; while domestically they are sold to abattoirs, tourism operators, and camel farms where they are used for meat production for consumption by humans and pets, and more recently intensive dairy farms¹².



Slaughtering “feral” camels for meat fit for human consumption through abattoirs exists in the States of SA, NT, Qld and WA. A pilot “kill program” was run by the Rural

⁸ McLeod, R 2004 Counting the Cost: Impact of invasive animals in Australia Table 1

⁹ See footnote 8

¹⁰ See footnote 8

¹¹ http://www.nintione.com.au/resource/ManagingImpactsFeralCamels_FinalReportAFCMP.pdf

¹² B Zeng Review of commercial options for management of feral camels

Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) in 2007¹³. It was concluded that standard cattle facilities with enough height in the race are suitable for slaughtering camels, and that the ideal age of a camel for slaughter is 3-5 years old (not including the dairy cows and calves). It was also concluded that it is permitted for feral camels to be taken from their wild environment directly to slaughter. As far as welfare is concerned, the Australian standard for the hygienic production and transportation of meat and meat products for human consumption (AS 4696:2007)¹⁴ is a general standard for all “stock” animals and is vague on the welfare procedures and ‘stunning’ methods. It’s prime objective is to ensure meat and meat products for human consumption comply with food safety. Standard AS4696-2007 is generally adopted under Food Acts and Regulations across jurisdictions such as Food Regulations 2009 (WA). The Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991(Cth)¹⁵ has adopted the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code – Standard 1.6.2 for the processing of game meat including camel meat, however this is a standard for human health and not animal welfare.

In 2012, the Rural Lands Protection Amendment (Stock Transport and Camels) Regulation 2012, under the Rural Lands Protection Act 1998, which regulates the transport of stock by vehicle, declared Camels as “stock”. This allowed for the transport of camels across the States for slaughter; live export and even for tourist rides. The welfare of camels in Transport such as using single deck vehicle due to their height is part of the (Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: The Camel)¹⁶, however this is not enforced in each jurisdiction. The Commonwealth standards for the transport of livestock are applicable across all States and Territories and take precedence over the welfare codes [Carey 2008]¹⁷.



¹³ Assessing the potential for a Commercial Camel Industry in Western Australia RIRDC 00/123

¹⁴ <http://www.publish.csiro.au/book/5553/>

¹⁵ section 92 [<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2004C00171/Download>]

¹⁶ <http://www.publish.csiro.au/book/5204/>

¹⁷ Carey, R., 2008. Cross-jurisdictional management of feral camels to protect NRM and cultural values

The live export of camels is regulated by Commonwealth export legislation and national transport standards. Standards for the Land transport of camels is derived from the *Australian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals –Livestock Transport version 1.1* 26¹⁸. The latter is a nationally endorsed document relating to the transport of livestock. It has been adopted by Qld, NT, SA however not WA.

Qld has a compulsory code of practice for land transport of livestock such as camels which commenced in 2014¹⁹. However, under the *Animal Care and Protection Regulation 2012(Qld)* section 3(2)²⁰ it is not compulsory for a person to comply with a code of practice mentioned in schedule 4. The ‘Model code of practice for the welfare of animals: camels’ falls under that schedule. In WA, the Department of Agriculture and Food (WA), is responsible for the administration of the *Animal Welfare Act 2002(WA)*. Under this Act²¹ the code of practice for the welfare of livestock is not compulsory. The National Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for the Land Transport of Livestock has not been incorporated into Western Australian animal welfare legislation. The Act does not currently authorise regulations providing for the health, safety and welfare of animals²².

In the Northern Territory, the *Animal Welfare Act 2000 (NT)*²³ specifies that the minister may adopt a code of practice from time to time. Under the *Northern Territory Livestock Regulations (NT)*, penalties exist for non-compliance with the relevant standard outlined in the Land Transport Standards²⁴.

In South Australia, *the Animal Welfare Act 1985 Act(SA)* applies equally to all animals including pest and feral species. Compliance with the requirements of the Act is mandatory²⁵. The model code of Practice for the welfare of the camel as well as the Model

¹⁸ <http://www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/files/2011/02/Land-transport-of-livestock-Standards-and-Guidelines-Version-1.-1-21-September-2012.pdf>

¹⁹ Animal Care and Protection Act 2001(Qld)

²⁰ under the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001(Qld), Part 2 Codes of practice,

²¹ section 84

²² [<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare/animal-welfare-act-amendments?page=0%2C1>]

²³ Section 24

²⁴ The Australian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals – Livestock Transport Ed1 2008

²⁵ https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/managing-natural-resources/plants-and-animals/animal-welfare/Codes_of_practice/animal-welfare-codes-of-practice

Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals in Air and land Transport of Livestock is adopted under *Animal Welfare Regulations 2012(SA), Schedule 2*²⁶,

Conclusions

In comparison to “domestic” or “native” animals, “feral” or “pest” animals such as the camel have been brought into Australia by humans. Although there is no doubt that introduced species in a foreign environment will cause some environmental damage, introducing such terms as “feral” and “pest” vilifies the animal in question and brings with it cruel actions and legislation (if any) that is mostly unenforceable.

According to Common Law, any land owner has the right to hunt or kill wild animals on their land²⁷. “Feral” camels can become the property of someone by capturing, confining or killing them and therefore acquiring rights to the use of the animal. There is therefore no clear responsibility for the management of feral camels. The fate or welfare of camels rests in the “humaneness” of the hunters and trappers which in itself is an oxymoron.

Although environmental impact of introduced species has been the subject of many studies, it is clear that the camel has had very little impact on the environment of Australia. Their environmental footprint is also minute compared to that of grazing animals and therefore in my opinion should not be included in a study as a reason to farm or kill them. The reality of controlling the camel or other species comes from the farmers needs to maximise profit and the government to introduce new industry around livestock.

Current Codes of Conduct for the welfare of animals are minimal standards of welfare and do not provide a national consistency in animal welfare policy. Australia’s live export animal welfare codes have been questionable and inadequate in the past decade²⁸. Apart from this, there is no general welfare applying to camels and enforcement is not policed. Regardless of any legislation or code of conduct existing, it is

²⁶<https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/R/ANIMAL%20WELFARE%20REGULATIONS%202012/CURRENT/2012.187.AUTH.PDF>

²⁷ Caulfield p147 note 31

²⁸ <https://www.voiceless.org.au/hot-topics/live-export>

worth noting that as far as “feral or pest” animals are concerned, the predominant attitude is that it is “necessary” to kill them. Whether the activity is cruel or not²⁹.

²⁹ Caulfield, M., 2009. Australian Animal Cruelty Law. 1st ed. Melbourne Australia: Malcolm Caulfield

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