

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: INVASIVE SPECIES INQUIRY

Mr BROCK (Frome) (11:45): I have great pleasure in also speaking on this report. I want to compliment the other members of the Natural Resources Committee and our chair, the Hon. Steph Key. This committee has been an excellent committee to work with, not only on the invasive species report but across all avenues of its jurisdiction and requests.

As with previous speakers, when it first came up the issue of invasive species did not seem to be a big issue, but as we got into the report there were a lot of issues that were highlighted. The member for Stuart has brought up one issue regarding funding. The rains that have been coming to the state in the last couple of years have been very welcome, but funding is set in advance and there are occasions when the great rains that have come in have been greatly beneficial to the rural area and the grain industry but at the same time have been detrimental, with the growth of weeds, etc., across the whole of the state.

When the time comes, quite often it is the situation that departments do not have the funding. So, as the member for Stuart has indicated, it is part of the report, and I strongly recommend, that there be an allocation or an allowance for emergency funding to be sought so the issue of invasive weeds, or whatever it may be, can be treated immediately instead of having to wait for some approval, which, at that stage, may be too long.

The other issue is weed management on road verges. There has been a lot of confusion as to who is responsible for that. There are local governments and there are also departments for lands and government agencies responsible for other areas. Sometimes, by the time a decision is made and they have come to a compromise, the damage has already been done with the invasive weeds coming across into private land, into their paddocks.

Another big issue that the member for Stuart brought up is mouse plagues. In some regional areas of South Australia the mouse plague has not been a real issue, but it has been in the Mid North, the top end of South Australia and the West Coast. This is an issue where the private owner of the land is responsible for maintaining the mouse plague on their property, and that is fair enough. I have had farmers say that they have killed nearly 1,000 mice in a night, and that is a lot of expense for them to go to—the mice have come from outside their area—so we need to look at some sort of funding for farmers to be able to combat this. The damage to them is one thing, but the damage to the state and the economic growth of our grain industry is another issue that we also need to address.

The issue of cane toads. We have not had the issue of cane toads, and not many people talk about it, but with the floods from Queensland coming down, with all the water and all the traffic, there is a great opportunity for cane toads to invade South Australia. Once cane toads get in they are virtually impossible to eradicate. As has been said previously, cane toads could come down on trucks (under wheels and inside containers) or come down the Murray-Darling Basin through all the rivers. We need to have an educational program to ensure that people are aware of that and understand it, because if that gets out of control then we are really going to be behind the eight ball.

The other issue is the aerial baiting of dingoes and wild dogs, etc., on the south side of the dog fence. I think that is an issue. I heard on the radio the other day that because the dog fence was down—there are a lot of gaps in it and there are still many kilometres of the fence itself under water—the dingoes and the wild dogs have come down from the north; they are coming in south of the dog fence. That should not happen, but it has happened, and those farmers need to be able to do some aerial baiting. That is one of the recommendations of this committee, and I hope that the government takes it on board.

The other thing is that we need to ensure that funding for invasive weeds is maintained and controlled at the time, and we said that earlier. We need to at least maintain that, but we also need to increase the funding so that invasive weeds can be managed according to the

weather. As we indicated earlier, the rain has been terrific, but when the rain comes it also brings in more invasive species, and there is an issue with the weeds. As the member for Mount Gambier said, with some of our species of animals once they have gone we will never see them back again. We need to make certain that that does not happen.

Another issue from a national parks point of view is that, if there are any invasive weeds on those lands, the comment is often made that that they do not have the funds. That is a valid point. Also, if it is on private land then the private landowner has to maintain it and eradicate those invasive weeds; if they do not, then the work will be carried out and they will be billed for that. We must ensure that there are adequate funds to fight the invasive weeds when they are on government land.

The member for Fisher has already indicated that we need to maintain money for research. As we move along, it is fine to maintain the current level; as a cost saver we may save some money in the short term—half a million or a million dollars—but if we do not maintain the research what could be the long-term damage to our state and our communities?

Again, I want to reinforce what a pleasure it has been to be on this committee. It has been a great learning curve for me, and I congratulate our chair, the Hon. Steph Key, and the other members of the committee. It is a well-worked committee, and I look forward to a lot more progress. I commend the report to the parliament.