

MEDIA RELEASE

NEW MODEL TACKLES URGENT ANIMAL WELFARE PROBLEM

The RSPCA says a new model that assesses the humaneness of pest control methods could help reduce the suffering of hundreds of thousands of animals every year.

The *Humaneness Assessment Model* is the first of its kind and gives landholders and government agencies a practical and effective way to assess the full welfare impact of their proposed control techniques.

“In terms of the number of animals affected, vertebrate pest control is one of the biggest animal welfare problems we have in this country,” RSPCA Australia Chief Scientist Dr Bidida Jones said.

“Every year hundreds of thousands of feral pigs, feral cats, wild dogs, rabbits, foxes and rodents are shot, poisoned, trapped or otherwise killed in ways that would be considered far from humane.

“Many non-target animals including domestic pets, possums and other native wildlife are often caught up along the way and can suffer a similar cruel fate.

“Until now there hasn’t been a tool to assess humaneness, so decisions on control programs have focused on increasing efficacy and reducing costs. Unfortunately, this has led to a situation in Australia where little consideration has been given for a pest animal’s capacity to feel pain, fear and distress.

“This has meant that several totally unacceptable methods are still in use in Australia. Chloropicrin (a type of tear gas), which causes intense pain and distress, is still used as a fumigant for rabbits; in Queensland and NSW, yellow phosphorus, which causes severe gastrointestinal irritation, can be used to kill feral pigs; and in Victoria, wild dogs can be caught in steel-jawed traps and left unattended to suffer for days on end.

“The new model allows us to grade humaneness using the latest available scientific information. It assesses each method in two parts: the overall welfare impact including the intensity and duration of suffering; and the killing method.

“A number of factors are considered to measure this impact including water and food deprivation, injury, functional impairment, behavioural restrictions, anxiety and pain and the time for an animal to fall unconscious.

“Developed through the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy, this model has had input from landholders, government, researchers, the pest control industry and the RSPCA so it is user-friendly and it is widely supported.

“The RSPCA hopes this model will see humaneness being regularly considered as an important part of vertebrate pest control and increase incentives to explore more humane alternatives.”

For more information visit www.daff.gov.au/humanenessmodel.