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FERAL HERBIVORE CONTROL ON THE ANANGU PITJANTJATJARA LANDS, 2004

A. Knight and R. Hall

APYLM, PMB 227, Umuwa, via Alice Springs, NT 0872

THE ANANGU PITJANTJATJARA YANKUNYTJATJARA LANDS (APY LANDS)

The Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands cover 10.7 million hectares, approximately 1/8th of the state of South Australia, in its remote and arid northwestern corner. A population of 2000 – 3000 *anangu* (people of the Pitjantjatjara lands) are scattered across 33 communities and outstations. English is a second language to Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and Ngatatjara, and many cultural practices are vastly different to those of *piranpa* (white people). Nearly 2 million hectares are managed as Indigenous Protected Areas. Surface water is sparse and most watering points are only rain fed rock holes that were traditionally maintained by the indigenous custodians of these sites. There are very few permanent waterholes. Anangu Pitjantjatjara Incorporated under the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act administers the lands. An APY member nominated executive advises a salaried Coordinator of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Management branch, Lexie Knight, and its 'Feral Control' portfolio is managed by the 'Feral Control Facilitator', R. Hall.

THE FERAL HERBIVORE PROBLEM

An aerial survey in August 2000 estimated that 4000 – 7000 horses, 1000 – 4000 donkeys and 2000 – 4000 camels roam the APY Lands. However a run of good seasons combined with relatively low predation, harvest and control have resulted in large population increases by both migration and breeding. The combined opinion of traditional owners, TO's, and involved professionals agree on a current estimation of about 20,000 camels on the APY lands. This could double in the next five years if seasons continue to be good and if dedicated and well-directed and well-resourced control methods are not adopted early and advanced speedily. Horse and donkey numbers still seem close to the estimates of the August 2000 aerial survey. It is clear that the present populations of large feral herbivores are so high, that even in short periods of drought all waterholes are severely degraded. Worse still, unlike *malu* (kangaroo) and *kalaya* (emu) that are important resources of *kuka* (meat), *anangu* do not eat donkey and horse. While some *anangu* eat camel, the beasts weigh up to 1500 kg and even calves are generally too large for *anangu* to use effectively.

APY APPLICATION TO THE REMOVAL OF FERAL HERBIVORES

In general *anangu* are against killing of ferals simply as an environmental measure. There have been recent discussions about a mobile abattoir for processing camels and donkeys in-situ on the 'Lands' however present opinion is generally still against such practices. Discussions continue and an emerging industry interest is gearing for competitive bidding for feral carcass 'product'. Such interest will possibly gain support in time as proposals develop, product viability improves, and local awareness of alternatives is explored.

Methods of live feral capture and export are presently being developed simultaneously among several community-based teams in the APY Lands. Yards of portable panels are erected close to good sources and animals are either trapped or mustered. Musters are conducted in a contemporary manner using motorbikes, 4WD's and occasional air assistance. Air support can be useful and economical for large immediate orders when contractual transport is available. However for slower markets where longer-term agistment is necessary for depoting stock, then local resources cannot handle so many animals quickly enough and the smaller and less expensive mustering methods are sufficient to keep a one-trailer truck busy. With a turnaround of over 1,000 km between the western-most source and the eastern-based agistment paddocks, it can easily take a week to load, transport, unload, service equipment and rest operators between loads. One standard 40 foot stock trailer can carry just eighteen large camels, or up to 60 donkeys. Large camels are difficult to load and require some training to

prepare them for a safe, stress-free and timely removal from the yards. All stock require feeding and watering while in the yards and the better they are managed during these times, the better the returns. Proper planning and preparation is essential for the economic success of supplying distant markets with marketable feral product.

Many challenges affect local ability to control these large ferals. Skill pools are still developmental and resources yet primitive and basic at best. Teams have applied themselves well to the tasks of evolving methods suited to local conditions and pooled skills, experiences and resources are improving. Intercommunity exchanges have centralized depoting facilities and developed some shared equipment. Effective strategies have been prioritized and good contributions made to the few orders that have actually been exported by the Central Australian Camel Industry Association, CACIA, this year.

A program of infrastructure and skill development is well progressed to address control issues and seems parallel to a rising curve of market demand.

MARKET FACTORS

APYLM is a corporate member of the CACIA that has gained an international reputation for professionalism and reliability for the supply and export of camels from Australia. By the end of 2002 orders had risen from 12 camels per fortnight for domestic consumption, to 300 per month mostly for 'halal hamburgers' in Malaysia. The Iraqi war and its attendant political and economical ramifications, and the activities of both importers/exporters and animal activists effectively ceased the export orders of 'feral product' from Australia throughout most of last year. Orders began to increase again towards the end of 2003, however shipping difficulties have continued to frustrate efforts to fill them. The industry is presently too small to utilize whole ships and decks are made available by arrangement with the principal shipping contractors, the sheep and cattle businesses. Many factors determine such third party agreements. Recent lowering of the Australian dollar again for example has improved the ability of the overseas market to buy Australian beef and now the swollen backlog of live cattle means less room for camels.

Product demand however is rising and two of the largest orders to date are presently in negotiation and these could see an additional 10,000 camels removed from Australia in the next year. An ability to begin supplying these orders rests partly with three middle-eastern countries that are yet to agree to 'multi-port-discharge' of stock from Australia, an arrangement apparently attractive to all parties. Camels are fetching similar to slightly lower prices at the wharves to cattle, ranging between \$1:25 to \$2:00/kg live-weight at the wharf. Trucking costs are averaging just over \$100/head from the 'Lands to the wharf, (to either Darwin or Adelaide), and camels typically weigh from 350 kg to over a ton. Larger animals are presently slaughtered for the domestic market due to height restrictions on the ships; camels must be 0.1 m below the lowest point of their shipping accommodation – usually the loading door! Recently, domestic slaughter of camels within Australia has gained impetus with several abattoirs now accepting camels, but at lower prices than the export market.

Horsemeat supply is a marginal enterprise and a risky, dangerous undertaking. Contractor interest in the more difficult hilly terrain seems likely to enable an effective control in those areas in the near short-term. Development of other resources will assist in longer-term control in less difficult terrain.

Donkey control seems best tackled by a mobile abattoir licensed for 'wild-kill' but such arrangements are embryonic and a forecast of likely results would be premature. If such arrangements were to remain untenable, then removal and control will be expensive and problematic. Even if an acceptance of such procedures were to allow its practice, returns are presently poor, but contributive nonetheless to a workable control strategy.