

# STOCK & LAND

## **Producers waiting with baited breath**

Stock & Land, Melbourne by JAMIE-LEE OLDFIELD

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AERIAL baiting of wild dogs in Victoria will be open for public consultation in another win for producers fighting against the feral pests.

Agriculture Minister Peter Walsh announced at the annual Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria (MCAV) gathering at the weekend that the Federal Government had approved the latest application for aerial baiting.

Mr Walsh said the application, which included new information the government believed demonstrated aerial baiting would not adversely affect spotted-tail quolls, would now proceed to a 20-day public consultation period.

"If the application secures final approval from the Commonwealth, Victoria will be ready to deploy an aerial baiting program across six sites in North East Victoria and East Gippsland this autumn," he said.

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These cameras were to monitor animal movements around baiting sites, and no quolls were detected in the new footage.

Possible implications for the quoll population was one of the reasons cited for the previous rejection of aerial baiting applications.

"The previous Labor Federal Government rejected Victoria's original application on ridiculous grounds, treating Victoria differently to NSW, where aerial baiting has been permitted," Mr Walsh said.

Victorian Farmers Federation president Peter Tuohy welcomed the State Government taking a first step towards aerial baiting in Victoria's high country.

"We are heartened by comments from Minister Walsh in stating that, if approved, aerial baiting could be rolled out as soon as autumn this year," he said.

"It is critical the Federal Government makes a quick decision following the 20-day public consultation period to enable a first round of baiting this year.

"It's a real relief to see this State Government take a pragmatic and logical approach to dealing with wild dogs and other pests that threaten farmers." Wild dogs have been at the forefront of the agenda in the past week, with announcements that red-tape will be cut in regard to fresh-meat baits for foxes and wild dogs.

National Wild Dog Advisory Committee chair Michael McCormack, Tallangatta, said while he had not seen the application, he was glad to hear it included new information from cameras at bait stations.

"Hopefully that is enough to get it over the line, and going with the other announcement about fresh baits last week, it could be all good news for the fight," he said.

"If it gets over the line maybe it will be ready for the autumn.

That would be what we hope." MCAV president Charlie Lovick said the announcement by Mr Walsh was well received by producers attending the get-together.

Hinnomunjie, the most remote in a series of locations at which the annual gathering was held, was right at the heart of where the wild dog problem lay, Mr Lovick said.

With about 4500 people in attendance, Mr Lovick said there was also a warm response to Environment Minister Ryan Smith's support of alpine grazing trials, especially as the temperatures rose steeply this week.

"Ryan Smith was also very well supported when he said he would continue to fight to put cattle back in the bush and protect people in the area from the wildfires they face every year we need to use every tool at our disposal to minimise the risk," he said.

"The reality is that it's a trial, and why wouldn't you open yourself to every opportunity to see what does and doesn't work especially on what was an original cattle property before being acquired by the national park?" The MCAV still awaits a decision from the Federal Government, after the State Government lodged a permit in November last year for a threeyear, 60-head cattle grazing trial in the Wonnangatta Valley.

Mr Lovick said the get-together saw a number of traditional high-country-grazing families in attendance, which could only be a good sign for the future of the mountains.

"It is about us teaching our children and everyone else's children that there is a home for them in the mountains," he said.

"The more people we can get to understand this, the safer it will be."

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