

Stakeholder consultation: Focus questions for discussion based on the consultant's recommendations

Based on the recommendations from the *Evaluation of the Exotic Birds Record Keeping Scheme, February 2009*, the department has suggested the following focus questions for your consideration. We welcome and encourage your comments on these questions and the consultant's recommendations.

1. ***A study should be commissioned to obtain baseline data on the full extent of exotic aviculture in Australia.***

- In February 2000 the department formulated a list of the exotic bird species (as registered or exempt under NEBRS) that were known to exist in Australia. To the department's knowledge there have been no further activities to this scale, to assess the extent of exotic aviculture in Australia.
- DEWHA acknowledges the limitations of this type of study:
 - some bird keepers may be unwilling to provide information about their birds if they have doubts about the origins of specimens held and believe they may be opening themselves to prosecution
 - bird keepers may have security concerns regarding the publication of their collections if they hold rare or expensive birds
 - difficulties in obtaining baseline data on all the species traded within Australia as many hobbyists are not involved in clubs or societies and therefore accessing information about their birds would be challenging.

Questions:

- a. What is the purpose and what could be gained by undertaking such a comprehensive study?
- b. Would this be a useful exercise for compliance purposes?
- c. How would DEWHA or an independent consultant be able to obtain baseline data on the full extent of exotic aviculture in Australia?
- d. Would bird keepers be willing to anonymously identify all species held in their collections?
- e. Would bird keepers be unwilling to provide information about their birds if they had doubts about the origins of specimens held?
- f. How would DEWHA or an independent consultant reach all the bird keepers within Australia (including pet owners)?
- g. Could this be done through major breeders and traders?

2. ***Engage the states and territories collaboratively to undertake an assessment of the risks of exotic aviculture in Australia including the classification of birds as high or low interest, and a definitive list of the species currently present in Australia. Based on the identified risks, discuss with the states and territories how exotic aviculture may be effectively regulated.***

- All state lists were taken into account when compiling the 2007 inventory (<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/trade-use/publications/inventory-exotic-bird07.html>).
- A meeting with state representatives is planned by DEWHA to ensure effective engagement and collaborative approaches to assessing the risks posed by exotic birds and illegal trade. The department will seek to encourage state and territory governments to convey the key message to exotic bird holders that there is value in maintaining records of specimens, regardless of requiring state licenses.

Questions:

- a. Is there value in re-classifying birds and what are the implications of moving birds between categories?
- b. Advantages of such collaborative work are well known but are there potential disadvantages?

3. Consider alternative measures to change the culture of bird keeping in Australia including a campaign to establish the keeping and use of individual specimen records (these records would not be returned to the department).

- Throughout the EBAG process the department has been mindful that the cost burden to the sector as a whole, as well as to individual bird keepers, should be low and that the Activity Record books and forms and the MTR books and forms could be provided by the department at minimal or no cost to bird keepers.
- The proposal for using individual specimen records was put to EBAG at the second meeting on 31 May 2006. At the time the department suggested promotion of the principle that paperwork stays with the birds on transfer. This was not adopted in the EBAG scheme.

Questions:

- a. Would passing records on with a transaction be beneficial and more practical to bird keepers than the current record keeping scheme?
- b. Do bird keepers see any practical benefits in returning records to the department? How do bird keepers imagine this happening?
- c. Would bird keepers continue to check and update the documentation corresponding to these individual specimen records?
- d. Would bird keepers be concerned over the security of their collections with this type of record keeping?
- e. What do bird keepers see as the negatives of this type of proposal?

4. Maintain the current scheme for high interest birds with improvements to be made to the forms.

- DEWHA has noted that the 12 month implementation period would help the department refine the record keeping scheme with stakeholder input so that it is both practical and workable if implemented in the long term. DEWHA sought to assist bird keepers in completing the scheme's records correctly over the first 12 months of the scheme's implementation by collecting and analysing record returns.
- DEWHA will continue to encourage record keeping with an ongoing communication strategy and considers that incremental improvement in record keeping by exotic bird keepers is a realistic outcome worth pursuing. This will also help bird keepers comply with the current legislation under the EPBC Act where owners must provide proof that their birds were lawfully imported.

Questions:

- a. Will bird keepers participate if the scheme continues?
- b. What improvements to the record keeping forms would bird keepers want if the scheme continued?
- c. What do bird keepers see as to the benefits of participating in the scheme or using the standard record forms?
- d. Would bird keepers still want the record forms to be returned to DEWHA? Why/why not?
- e. What are the reasons for non-participation in the scheme?

5. Cancel the record keeping scheme for low interest birds.

- Under the scheme, species in classes 2 and 3 have been assessed as lower risk to Australia. However despite this fact, illegal activity may still occur. Bird keepers may therefore decide if it is in their interests to keep records for these species.

Questions:

- a. Which species that are low interest should records continue to be kept for? Why?
- b. Which low interest species should not need records?
- c. Do bird keepers think illegal trade is occurring in low interest birds?

6. Scrutinise the information on forms returned to the department under the current scheme to establish the range of species in trade, the number of transactions per species, and the numbers of bird keepers participating in the scheme. Actively verify the linkages between activity records and movement transaction records for possible compliance purposes.

- In addition to promoting the scheme during the first 12 months, to help achieve the transition, DEWHA indicated that they would monitor returns to confirm the adequacy of records as an indicator of the level of acceptance of record keeping. The records would also help to identify improvements and allow for office based intelligence gathering. Record returns in the first 12 months were seen to be critical in establishing a baseline on which to evaluate the operation of the record keeping scheme and reviewing future options.
- The evaluation determined some of the commonly traded species as recorded on the MTR and Activity Record forms, but this is unlikely to represent all species being held or traded (due to the sampling method and number of returns sent to the department).

Questions:

- a. What are the concerns of bird keepers of DEWHA scrutinising the forms?
- b. Do bird keepers think that the forms will represent an adequate indication of what and how many birds are being traded?

7. Establish a clear record/database of all the clubs, societies and other key stakeholder organisations to form part of the information base to establish the level of activity in the exotic aviculture industry.

- A database of all known clubs and societies was created at the beginning of the scheme's implementation phase. DEWHA acknowledges that there may be many other smaller clubs in Australia that do not advertise their existence in a conventional manner.
- As part of the department's communication strategy to bird keepers, this database will be updated on a regular basis. New clubs are encouraged to provide their details to the department, so they can receive future updates on exotic bird keeping activities. Bird keepers are also welcome to inform the department of any other relevant bodies who would benefit from this information.
- Clubs, societies and other key stakeholder organisations (as well as any exotic bird owner) are encouraged to subscribe to the department's exotic bird email alert list <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/trade-use/exoticbirds/index.html>, where they will be notified of any changes or relevant information on the keeping of exotic birds.

Question:

- a. What are the main concerns with continuing this practice?

8. Re-establish a representative body of exotic aviculture stakeholders, to provide input and advice to the department regarding the regulation of exotic aviculture.

- A key stakeholder meeting with bird keepers to discuss the results of the evaluation and the consultant's recommendations. These stakeholders will be those that attended the previous stakeholder meeting (or are the new representative for those clubs or societies). Submissions from the public will also be requested and stakeholders will be welcome to submit their own submissions before the meeting or on issues not covered/answered in the meeting by the end of May submission deadline.

Questions:

- a. Do bird keepers think that a representative body is effective in providing input and advice to DEWHA?
- b. Who/ what type of people would bird keepers accept as representatives of the exotic bird sector?