

The Assistant Secretary,  
( Development ).

SHEEP GRAZING : CANBERRA CITY AREA.

I refer to Senator H.S.Seward's letter of 21st October, which I have seen today on return to Canberra after being away last week on duty.

2. The question of sheep grazing is an important one and would certainly be advantageous for the purpose mentioned if any could be arranged in the city area. There are a number of difficulties, however, the most important of which depends on a matter of policy, in that for success of such a scheme, the Commonwealth must own the sheep which are to be used.

3. The present altered situation has come about by degrees but particularly in the last few years with the rapid extension of the city and the breaking up of the original large areas which had been fenced and grazed previously. The earlier condition made it unnecessary for any alteration of the longstanding policy that the Commonwealth would not purchase sheep.

4. The reason for the need to change this policy is primarily that a private owner is concerned with wool and meat production whereas the sheep should be managed in a case such as this, as grass-eaters and the condition and general management of the animals must be subsidiary to the satisfactory cropping of grass. A private owner, even with the best of intention, can not be expected to aim for other than maximum wool and meat production.

5. If sheep grazing could be arranged, it would allow the more effective use of the existing machinery and would be supplementary to it, but not replace it. I anticipate from any such scheme that the money return from the sheep should just about equal the cost of management of them.

6. The main points to be considered in such a proposal are that:-

- a. The areas concerned are generally small for grazing, numerous and scattered.
- b. It is necessary to put a large number of animals on for a relatively short time in separate areas to achieve the desired result.
- c. Several paddocks of a substantial area would be necessary in the surrounding country so that the total flock available for the vacant areas in the city would be considerably above the annual carrying capacity of that land, and also to permit the carrying of a reserve flock.
- d. Shepherding would be necessary in many cases as it would be impracticable to fence out all the young trees and other plants which would be liable to damage.



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- e. Considerable care would have to be taken to protect the sheep, especially at night, from city dogs.
- f. It would probably be desirable to raise a small flock from young lambs which would be conditioned to an electric fence, and could therefore be contained within an electric fence, as well as having a general flock for more extensive grazing.
- g. It would probably be necessary to have special large trailer transport to meet some of the needs for shifting the sheep from place to place.

7. This proposal touches on a larger and still more important problem, viz., the management of a zone of land surrounding the city area, and which is an intrinsic part of the facilities of the city for shelter, recreation and landscape. I have referred to this area elsewhere as a "green belt" and the proper management of it to maintain it in a satisfactory condition now requires rather urgent reorganisation and a change of policy of the existing land management. This, of course, has arisen in the same way due to the rapid expansion of the city in recent years. In my opinion, the lands in this area should be managed on an agistment basis with a substantial proportion of the sheep used owned by the Commonwealth so that proper tree planting and organised grazing for fire protection can be carried out in the interests of the city. For reasons similar to those mentioned above, grazing of sheep by the private owner can not be successful because his basic interests are naturally opposed to those of the city. The more limited scheme which is the subject of Senator Seward's letter, would initiate the policy of the Commonwealth owning and managing sheep, and would be a start in this direction with the full scheme as its ultimate goal, which might well take effect at the termination of the existing 25 year leasing period in 1958.

8. It is submitted for consideration, therefore, and recommended that the following points be approved as a matter of policy:-

- i. The Commonwealth purchase and manage suitable flocks of sheep for grazing in the city area, and the surrounding "green belt" zone.
- ii. That withdrawal of land from 25 year lease in the "green belt" zone (plan attached) at the termination of the present lease period in 1958 be approved in principle.
- iii. That withdrawal immediately of land held under shorter term tenure as necessary for the scheme be approved.
- iv. That approval be given to the construction of a number of dog-proof holding yards.
- v. That approval be given to the employment of about four shepherds with dogs.
- vi. That approval be given to purchase trailer transport for shifting some sheep as necessary.

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8. Senator Seward's suggestion that the experience at the University of Western Australia is comparable with Canberra I think needs to be accepted with reservations as the former area is a single, more-or-less enclosed piece of ground which is generally not used for residential purposes and is easy to manage in the way he suggests, but quite different from the conditions in Canberra. I can not share his optimism about the financial returns, although, subject to the policy decisions mentioned above, I consider the proposal to use sheep would be of general benefit in the management of the city and make an overall economy.

9. A more detailed list of requirements as to areas, funds, materials and equipment could be prepared if the main proposals are approved.



( L.D. Pryor )  
Superintendent,  
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27/10/52.

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