

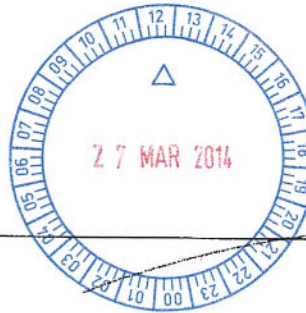
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Ms Lauren Mesiti
Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Public Administration,
Legislative Council,
Parliament House
Perth WA 6000

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26 March 2014

Dear Ms Mesiti,

re: Inquiry into recreational hunting systems in Western Australia

The Warren Catchments Council Inc is a small community-based natural resource management group based in Manjimup WA. WCC has an elected committee and about 7 staff, mostly part-time. More than 95% of our funding is obtained through competitive grants processes (Commonwealth, State and regional), while a very small portion of our income is sourced through fee-for-service work, or provided by the Shire of Manjimup (who support our Ribbons of Blue river care program).

One of our key ongoing programs is an effort to control feral pigs on both private agricultural land and public estate (usually naturally vegetated) across various sections of our catchments. We have been engaged in this pursuit for several years under various grants (Commonwealth, State and regional).

Feral pigs are a major problem for both biodiversity and agriculture across many sections of the South West. Their ability to destroy habitat or crop or pasture is possibly second to no other pest species across the area at present. Therefore a key factor in the protection of natural assets and agricultural productivity across the South West is the ongoing effort to control feral pigs.

More recently we have expanded our coordination efforts to take in a large part of the Lower South West (LSW) region. Our project area reaches from south east of Northcliffe right across to Augusta and north to around Collie.

We liaise closely with local land managers including the WA Department of Parks & Wildlife, Department of Agriculture & Food WA, local police, local governments and the RSPCA. Through our close and positive relationships with these agencies we are able to secure permits to enter and operate on public estate for the purpose of feral pig control.

This privilege of access is accorded to us and the groups we work with because, as a sector, we have spent many years developing a code of practice which sets the highest standards of occupational health and safety and of the humane treatment of animals.

[continued on page 2]

Our work is also of high efficiency, and we (the sector) have taken great care to ensure our techniques have evolved as we have learned. We research work from other areas in order to learn new ideas. We have become very effective: our monitoring programs show that we have reduced feral pig numbers in some previously infested areas to very low (almost nil) levels.

We lead our current program by engaging with four other landholder groups across the LSW. We arrange for and financially support the training and accreditation of their feral pig control operators. We also arrange and pay for the insurances required so that they have cover for public liability and for their own work cover. We work closely with local agencies to put in place specific operational plans.

While there are some paid workers engaged in our program, the vast majority of people in it are unpaid volunteers, many of them local landholders. No one participates because they want to hunt feral pigs: it is not recreation. The single purpose of our concerted efforts is the protection of natural assets and agricultural lands from the damage caused by feral pigs. We have broad community support.

We use a range of techniques to control feral pigs, all approved by the agencies we work with (including the RSPCA). Hunting however, is not one of our techniques.

The hunting of feral pigs (i.e. the tracking, chasing, and use of dogs to bail up and hold feral pigs) falls outside of our code of practice because it is not an adequately safe way to deploy people, it is very likely to result in the inhumane treatment of both pigs and dogs and it is simply counter-productive to the effort of controlling feral pig populations.

Pig populations tend to be very readily scattered by hunting activity, and pigs will learn very quickly to avoid any hint of human activity. Once the lesson is learned it is not forgotten. It appears that entire pig groups including new generations will adopt the avoidance behaviours learned by pigs which have experienced - and escaped - hunting.

Recreational pig hunters are not new to the LSW. For many years such people have been hunting illegally. Associated with this pig hunting activity are the dubious practices of using dogs to hunt and of dumping pigs in natural bushland to breed up and be hunted later.

This artificial re-invasion (or pig dumping) is particularly problematic because in any feral animal control program, it is often the re-invasions which grossly extend the period required to control the pest species.

Our experience, held broadly across the sector, is that pig dumping is closely associated with the same people who are presently involved in illegal recreational pig hunting.

If a licenced recreational hunting system is applied to Western Australia, then we believe that it will become impossible for our model of feral pig control to continue.

The risk to the safety of our feral pig control operators in the field will increase significantly if there is an influx of recreational hunters, in part because of the increased number of people shooting rifles and in part because of the inevitable confrontations that will occur when different people with different purposes meet, carrying firearms.

The broader community will hear of the incidents of inhumane treatment of pigs and dogs which is likely to ensue. They will gradually lose the ability to distinguish between licenced recreational hunter and feral pig control operator, and between the practices of each. They will eventually remove their support from the genuine efforts to control feral pig numbers and tar us all with the same brush. Without broad community support we cannot function.

Artificial re-invasions will increase as the number of (licenced) recreational hunters increases, and the wariness and scatter of pig populations will increase to a point where control methods are no longer effective.

[continued on page 3]

Regarding the Inquiry's Terms of reference, we believe that:

- a) while other States may have regulated, licensed recreational hunting systems, we can find no evidence that such systems actually do contribute to the control of feral pigs and, in fact, wide anecdotal evidence seems to suggest the opposite: such systems actually serve to perpetuate the problem of feral pest species. There is simply no prospect of any environmental contribution to public lands.

We are not qualified to comment on the potential for such systems to contribute economic, cultural or recreational benefits, other than that our view is that modern hunting, with all of the associated activity it brings, is not the sort of recreation for which these public lands were set aside.


- b) (i) there would be no net benefit should a similar system be adopted in Western Australia. To the contrary, the net loss would be high.

Any economic gain to our region derived from the licensing of recreational hunting is likely to be insignificant. However, the economic contribution of our agricultural sector is of the highest significance. Proper, purposeful, systematic and enduring feral pig control programs will continue to support agriculture.

There will be no gains to the natural environment resulting from the licensing of recreational hunting. Such activity disperses pig populations, makes them wary and is closely associated with an increase in artificial re-invasion or pig dumping. (This pig dumping is critical for the ongoing provision of hunting targets for recreational hunters; this is why they carry it out.) Legitimate operators (now working in proper, purposeful, systematic and enduring feral pig control programs) will not be able to be deployed because their occupational health and safety will be grossly eroded. Without these effective programs, feral pig numbers will increase across the landscape.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Owens

Chairman

WARREN CATCHMENTS COUNCIL INC



Mark Sewell

Executive Officer

WARREN CATCHMENTS COUNCIL INC