



Ms Lauren Mesiti

Committee Clerk

Standing Committee on Public Administration,

Legislative Council, Parliament House,

Perth, WA 6000

Fax: 089 222 7805

Reference: 140316\_WA\_Rec\_Hunting\_Systems

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Dear Committee Member,

Please find my submission for Inquiry into Recreational Hunting In Western Australia.

### **Executive Summary**

I recommend that the Standing Committee on Public Administration investigates the adoption of a Game Hunting Model based on the Victorian Game Hunting model with an independent Game Management Authority. The Victorian Game Hunting model is considered by many hunters in Australia to be the most progressive system that takes into account safety, public land access, scientific game management practices, co-use of public land with other users and animal welfare concerns.

### **Western Australia Versus Victoria Public Land Hunting My Experience**

I grew up in Perth with my school holidays spent on the grandparent's farm where I learnt basic firearm safety and how to hunt rabbits and foxes. Access to other areas to hunt was extremely limited by conditions of my firearm licence and gaining permission of the landowner generally via family relatives.

I participated in a couple of seasons of duck hunting after gaining my Western Australian game licence but this opportunity was closed by the Labour Government in 1992. There was no other public land opportunities made available to me during my decade working in the eastern goldfields.

In 2000 I moved from Western Australia to Melbourne, Victoria. For a Western Australian hunter I was pleasantly surprised to find the Victorian State Government actively supported public land hunting. I couldn't believe I could hunt on public land for deer, ducks and quail once the game licence was issued. The government introduced a bounty for foxes and wild dogs which supports my local fox hunting club towards the upkeep of our beagles.

I joined several hunt clubs and associations that hunted game such as ducks, deer and quail and also animals declared as pests including pigs, goats, foxes, rabbits and hares. It is possible to hunt in public land for Sambar, Fallow and Red deer just over an hour drive from Melbourne Central Business District with no land access booking system. If the weather was good and I felt like an evening deer stalk just loaded up my dogs and went for a look.

My move to Victoria also coincided with me joining the Australian Deer Association which encourages the promotion of the status of deer in Australia as a resource to be hunted and the deer to be fully utilised. Through this association I learnt to hunt, track and process any deer I managed to take and now I enjoy a freezer full of venison steaks and sausages.

The majority of my recommendations to the committee and terms of reference are based on my experience with the Victorian System although I have also used the New South Wales system when I hunt interstate. I found the New South Wales system to be not as progressive as the Victorian System.

### **What Animals Could be Hunted in Western Australia and Have Intrinsic Value?**

There are many animals to hunt and some are preferred meat eating species, these being goats, pigs, deer, camels, horses, donkeys, rabbits, ducks and quail. All of these species are declared as pests in Western Australia except for ducks and quail. However I understand duck hunting in Western Australia is strictly for pest management, not game management.

The preferred meat eating species can result in the harvesting of animals whose game meat if bought from a gourmet butcher such red deer can cost over \$30/kg. Therefore a deer can be worth several hundred dollars to a hunter prepared to butcher and preserve their own meat. Farm bred rabbits prepared at the butchers cost approximately \$14/rabbit. So a successful day hunting and preparing food can significantly reduce the family food bill if the distance to travel to a public land hunting area is not prohibitive.

Carnivores such as foxes, wild dogs and cats are generally not considered good meat sources. If a Victorian model was adopted then a bounty would be paid to recreational hunters for scalps for foxes and wild dog which currently is \$10 and \$100 respectively. Since the bounty was re-introduced in 2011 over 243,000 foxes and 1000 wild dog scalps have been handed in by recreational hunters which the Victorian Government considers the total a significant amount.

## **The Importance of Declared Game Versus Declared Pest Species**

In Victoria deer, ducks and quail are declared game species. The hunting of them must comply with the Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012. The Regulations will allow game hunting in a way that provides for sustainable, humane and safe hunting opportunities. The new regulations modernise the previous regulations, cut red tape, ensure equitable sharing of game resources and provide opportunities for game-related businesses.

The regulations ensures the use of hunting methods consistent with animal welfare concerns. This includes the type of hunting, the minimum calibre size and projectile weight, the types of dogs used for hunting, declared seasons and bag limits. Victoria has been the most progressive in balancing the needs of hunters and game management.

Declared pest species are not subjected to the same regulations and can be hunted on vacant crown land after obtaining the relevant permit from the local Department for Primary Industries. Victoria and New South Wales hunting models have both game species and pest species incorporated into them. This recognises the that some species should be managed differently.

I think that Western Australia would severely limit their recreational hunting opportunities by taking a pest management approach only. I believe that some animals such as deer, ducks and quail as the bare minimum should be declared game with associated game regulations to protect that status.

## **Where to Hunt in Western Australia?**

Victoria allows the hunting of game species in some national parks, state game reserves, state forests and vacant crown land. National parks are the preferred domain of deer stalkers. The state game reserves for duck hunters. State forests for deer hound hunters and vacant crown land for rabbits and foxes. The hunting maps issued by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries show areas where hunting may occur, what type of hunting and the season. There is no public land hunting in water catchment areas.

I submit to the committee that they investigate a similar classification for the type of species, hunting methods and locations for Western Australia. There will be areas within the state that will have a predominance of certain species. The recent hysteria regarding hunting in national parks in NSW is perplexing given the almost incident free hunting that has occurred in state forests for several years and the fact that Victoria has been hunting in national parks for more than 40 years.

## **Economic Benefits to Rural Communities**

My observation of small rural communities that border public land hunting areas that they receive considerable benefit from hunters, just like coastal towns receive benefit from recreational fishing. Deer hunters may spend several nights in the town as a base, and from there explore areas that show significant game activity. They will shop there for outfitting supplies, newsagents, restaurants and fuel. During the duck season many towns have signs welcoming duck hunters during the opening season just like the mountain resorts do during the opening of the ski season.



In 2014 the Victorian Government has declared that Game Hunting in Victorian on public land is worth \$100M a year to the economy and it attracts interstate and international hunters keen to participate in deer and duck hunting opportunities they cannot get at home. I believe a number probably a quarter of this is realistic for Western Australia if one considers the multiplier effect for hunting gear, outfitters, firearm shops, accommodation etc.

### **Cultural Benefits to the Community**

There is a strong hunting culture in Victoria. It is not related to being a farmer or owning large tracts of land. The highest number of deer hunters in Victoria are located in suburban Melbourne based on surveys of members by the Australian Deer Association. Every weekend during the hunting season thousands of enthusiasts take to the forests and mountains to spend time by themselves, their dogs, their friends and families. On any weekend during the hunting season you can see many hunting vehicles along the Hume or Princess Highway heading towards their favourite hunting spots some with specially built crates for their hunting dogs. They enjoy the fresh air, the warmth of a campfire and the special time away. If they are successful in the hunt then it's time for celebration. If not then there's always next time to hunt the elusive game.

They share that land with other land users such as bushwalkers, fresh water fisherman, horse riders, motorbike riders, four wheel drive enthusiasts, birdwatchers and forestry workers. Everybody learns to appreciate the opportunity to utilise and share the public land for a variety of uses generally with little conflict.

Overtime I believe that there would be a similar cultural benefit to Western Australia as it becomes a more accepted recreational pursuit such as fishing which provides a genuine pastime that can put fresh food on the family table.

I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have either by phone or in person.

Yours sincerely

Charles McHugh