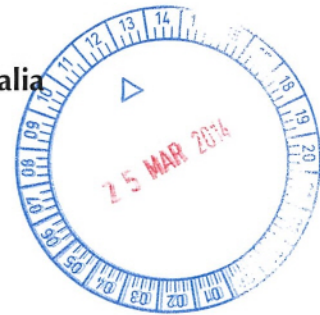


Inquiry into recreational hunting systems in Western Australia

To the Committee

Please find attached my submission to the above inquiry.



Summary

That the Committee favourably view the adoption of regulated, licensed recreational hunting systems on public lands within Western Australia.

Although the primary benefits will be for pest control, that should not be the limiting factor in allowing access; that is, it should be about recreational hunting and not just a narrow definition of "pest control". However, it is undeniable that WA has a feral pest problem.

The Feral Problem

Australia has a feral animal problem and, by extrapolation, so does Western Australia. It would be nonsense to think otherwise. Consider the following estimated numbers of feral animals across Australia, and extrapolate the situation in WA from these figures.

Red fox	7 000 000 +
European rabbit	200 000 000 +
Dromedary camel	1 500 000 (est. from 2009 figures)
Feral goat	2 600 000 (1996 figure)
Feral cat	innumerable
Feral pig	25 000 000

These figures are startling enough, but add to them water buffalo, brumbies, donkeys, deer and the cane toad, and the situation is dire.

No-one pretends that hunting alone will provide an answer to the problem, but if used in conjunction with other methods (biological, baiting, trapping) it has a valid contribution to make.

The Benefits

Economic

While it is hard to quantify, figures suggest that the average hunter spends over \$4000 per annum on his or her chosen recreation. This includes direct spending (firearms, ammunition, clothing, licences etc.) as well as indirect spending (fuel, accommodation, food and beverages, camping equipment etc.).

Given that much of the money is spent in or while travelling to or from hunting areas, it can be seen that it will be small local businesses and communities who will benefit most. It is not idle speculation to think that

this money may well be the difference between a small business staying open or closing.

Cultural

Hunting is of itself a culture. Its roots extend back as far as mankind itself. It is an honourable culture. Indeed, in some countries—sadly not Australia—to be called a “hunter” is a source of pride and a mark of distinction. A German *Jäger*, for instance, is respected throughout the community *and* by the authorities.

Not all hunters hunt to destroy feral pests. For many, hunting is the means to put fresh, organic meat on the table. From the humble rabbit to goat, pig and even macropods where allowed, hunting for food is a valid cultural and recreational occupation.

Recreational

The number of licensed firearms owners in Western Australia is approaching 100 000. That is a huge number of people for whom shooting—and hunting—is a valid recreational outlet. It is no different from, for example, recreational fishing. In that context, a firearm is simply another tool, no more or less than a fishing rod and reel. Their recreation is presently restricted for lack of public lands on which to hunt. This is a discriminatory situation which the Committee has the power to reverse, and should do so.

The Model

There is no doubt that a properly regulated system of hunting on public land works — the evidence from Queensland, NSW and Victoria for example, is overwhelming.

Accordingly, it is suggested that WA use or, better still, adapt an existing, working model.

I suggest this model should incorporate the following:

Regulation

Regulation in the sense used here describes a system that requires booking the use of the land by prospective hunters.

It would also of necessity incur a fee for the provision of booking services and oversight. It is my suggestion that an annual fee of \$50, capped for a minimum of five years, and which allowed hunters Statewide access to nominated public lands, would be suitable.

Alternatively, it may be possible for the State to impose a "levy" of, say, 5% on all hunting/shooting-related purchases in WA, with the proviso the funds be used exclusively to support a public lands hunting system.

Training

Hunters should have some form of training and/or testing before being allowed access to public lands.

I would suggest as a minimum something *at the level of* the SSAA safety training course, and perhaps a qualifying shoot *to the standards of* the SSAA "Farmer Assist" program.

Credit could also be given for previous experience or qualifications, such as Range Officer qualifications, or even prior military training.

Public safety and misperceptions

This could best be met by use of buffer zones and restrictions on hunting areas and times. For example, popular tourist areas, or areas prized by other users, such as the Bibbulmun Track, should be "excised" from hunting. Hunting could also be proscribed at night, for example, or from the back of vehicles.

In any case, the vast majority of public concerns are as a result of (deliberate) misinformation by those with vested ideological or political interests. The fact is that nowhere in Australia has there been any incident or accident concerning hunters and non-hunters on public lands. The oft-cited "dangers" are generally made using USA figures, and the countries and cases are not synonymous.

Additionally, there would be a need for a public education campaign, to make it clear that safety is paramount, that hunting has benefits to the nation, and that despite portrayals to the contrary, the average Australian hunter is not a "redneck". In fact, in a national survey of hunters by the University of Queensland in 2012, more than 50% of respondents were classified as "technicians/trade workers", "managers" or "professionals".

One common misperception is that hunting is "cruel" to the animal(s) being hunted. There are a couple of factors to consider here:

- (a) Poisoning, another preferred control method, is infinitely more painful than shooting. The animal's suffering is severe and often prolonged.
- (b) A bullet to a vital centre can cause almost instantaneous death. Even when it is not instantaneous, there is massive nerve shock,

and the opportunity for a quick follow-up shot. *No ethical hunter would ever leave an animal in pain.*

- (c) Nature itself is cruel, far crueller than any hunter. Animals very rarely die a peaceful death in nature.

Conclusion

There are many and varied benefits to be had by the State and its citizens if public lands are opened up for recreational hunting.

Indeed, the benefits far outweigh the supposed disadvantages, many of which are ill-founded opinion in any case.

I urge the Committee to fully support regulated, licensed recreational hunting on public lands in WA, and to acknowledge the benefits to be had by initiating such a system.

Bruce Tuffin