PARKS FORUM

PARKS CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Standing Committee on Public Administration

Inquiry into the potential environmental contribution of recreational hunting systems

TOR: That the Council acknowledges the use in other States of regulated, licensed recreation hunting systems and the potential environmental contribution made in controlling pest animals on public lands, together with the possible economic, cultural and recreational benefits to the community.

Submission

Parks Forum, the peak body for park management organisations in Australia and New Zealand, endorses the implementation of the principles of management effectiveness[1] in all areas of park management. It is essential that any consideration of the environmental contribution of recreational hunting systems assesses the context, planning, inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of the proposed recreational hunting.

There must also be defined measures to determine and benchmark success. Consideration of context requires judicious understanding of legislative and international frameworks under which the parks and reserves were created, the many and varied users which currently visit them, as well as their present and future contribution to the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of the state.

Parks and reserves are an integral part of Western Australia's conservation, recreation and tourism sectors. They feature in major international and national tourism campaigns, and are known to significantly contribute to regional economies[2]. Tens of millions of people visit the State's national parks and reserves each year to participate in passive or active recreation, experience Indigenous culture and benefit from contact with nature.

Visitors want to enjoy themselves free from conflict with other users whether they are participating in family bushwalks, bird watching, canoeing or mountain biking. Determination on the introduction of recreational hunting systems will need to consider real and perceived visitor safety, review systems that are in place to manage possible conflict between different visitor segments and, calculate the human and financial resources required to implement it (e.g. education, licences, infringement notification etc). It is imperative that any new activity adds to the diverse suite of visitor experiences and does not detract from our national and international ecotourism reputation or discourage the community to be active in parks[3].

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[1] Fiona Leverington, Katia Lemos Costa, Jose Courrau, Helena Pavese, Christoph Nolte, Melitta Marr, Lauren Coad, Neil Burgess, Bastian Bomhard, Marc Hockings (2010) Management effectiveness evaluation in protected areas – a global study. Second edition – 2010 The University of Queensland Brisbane AUSTRALIA

[2] Carlsen, J and Wood, D. (2004). Assessment of the economic value of recreation and tourism in Western Australia's national parks, marine parks and forests. Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre, Southport, QLD.

[3] News ABC http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-01-13/hunting-crackdown/5196542

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National parks protect and conserve unique species, ecosystems and landscapes. They are critical links in the system of vegetation corridors and have a vital role to play in biodiversity conservation as the climate changes. The Department of Parks and Wildlife undertakes a range of operational methods to control invasive species and it is essential that any introduction of recreational hunting system in parks and reserves will compliment current programs and measurably enhance biodiversity outcomes.

The science and operational implementation of invasive species is informed by research undertaken by the Invasive Species Cooperative Research Council and by conservation bodies like the Invasive Species Council. Parks Forum understands that most ad hoc recreational hunting does not provide beneficial outcomes for parks and reserves. A scientific basis is required for a successful program and this relies on having a clear purpose, an understanding of the program's effectiveness and ensuring the use of humane methods.

The Invasive Species Council articulated that random recreational shooting has little impact on the control of pest species due to the random nature of the hunting and the relatively low kill rates in comparison to strategically planned, operational programs that target specific species in particular areas. Other factors which limit the effectiveness of recreational hunting systems include low or poor skill levels of shooters in comparison to professional hunters; the breeding habits of many of the feral species (e.g. polygamous species); altering the behaviour of target species thereby interfering with planned programs; the motivation of some shooters to maintain populations for future hunting purposes; and the translocation of species into new areas[4].

In other Australian States, the use of recreational shooting to achieve defined environmental outcomes has been undertaken as part of planned operational programs. In South Australia, Operation Bounceback takes place on national park reserves, Aboriginal owned and managed land, and pastoral lands. Its primary goals are to lose no species and establish five biodiversity corridors across the State's semi-arid environments[5]. In Victoria, Conservation Pest Management Teams assist government departments and landholders in the control of invasive species. The program is coordinated by the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (Victoria) and team members are required to be proficient, safe and able to work in designated areas without assistance.

Review of recreational hunting in other Australian States has identified a number of issues associated with occupational health and safety of parks and wildlife staff, other government workers and contractors. Any system introduced into Western Australia will need to review current requirements to ensure changes to parks and reserve activities maintain safe working conditions. Consideration must also be given to the planning of extreme sporting events managed by event companies and possible conflicts that might arise between different park users in remote locations.

In Western Australia, a range of environmental risks may complicate the introduction of recreational hunting systems. The impact of vehicles used by hunters on the movement of plant pathogens such as *Phytophthora cinnamomi* and unplanned fire are threats must be understood and quantified.

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[4] Invasive Species Council 2012 Recreational hunting NSW: claims v facts. www.invasives.org.au

[5] Government of South Australia Department of Environment Water and Natural Resources. Managing natural resources. Bounceback (2014) www.environment.sa.gov.au

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Parks Forum articulates the diverse environmental, cultural, social and economic benefits that parks and reserves contribute to our nation[6]. We recognise that successful management of parks requires the implementation of effective systems and adaptive management. Current experience indicates that control of invasive species in parks and reserves is best undertaken as part of a planned program that clearly defines objectives, measures of success and accounts for the safety of staff and park visitors as well as meeting animal welfare requirements.

The introduction of recreational hunting systems should be considered in concert with the diverse range of opportunities already available in Western Australia's parks and reserves and ensure that it does not compromise these or detract from their international reputation as places to experience nature. Most importantly, the primary aim of any control program in protected areas must be to achieve conservation outcomes.

Submitted by

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[6] Parks Forum 2008 The Value of Parks. Parks Forum Ltd, Australia

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