

Hon Darren West; Hon Peter Katsambanis; Chair; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Liz Behjat; Hon Simon O'Brien;
Hon Mark Lewis

Standing Committee on Public Administration — Twenty-third Report — “Report on Recreational Hunting Systems” — Motion

Resumed from 18 March on the following motion moved by Hon Liz Behjat —

That the report be noted.

The CHAIR: Members, because we are operating under new standing orders, I point out that Hon Liz Behjat has expired her three opportunities to speak for 10 minutes, as has Hon Rick Mazza and Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson. I hope that assists members. It is now the continuation of the remarks of Hon Darren West, who has four minutes remaining.

Hon DARREN WEST: I will be brief and finish off the contribution that I was making last time when we discussed the report from the Standing Committee on Public Administration on the recreational hunting system. As I indicated last week, I certainly respect Hon Rick Mazza for bringing this review on and that it was, as I understand, his persistence and hard work that got the inquiry underway. It was an interesting inquiry with deeply held views on all sides of the debate.

I make a contemporary point that is not at all related to the inquiry that I think is important to make. A matter did attract quite a lot of media attention over the weekend; indeed, it was a tragedy. There was a terrible shooting accident recently in my electorate on private property, as I understand, and of course the families are grieving as a consequence. That event, a terrible tragedy, is in no way linked to the work of this committee. That accident occurred on private, freehold land, and regardless of what the government decides to do with the committee findings, hunting is permitted on freehold land with the permission of the landowner. I think it is an important point that there was an attempt to mix that tragedy up in with the findings of this committee. We had to make it very clear that regardless of the government's view on this report, the point that I made in my previous contribution was that hunters will be allowed to go on freehold land with the permission of the owner, as happened in this sad event. That is why I thought there was no need to expand that capacity that hunters have to go onto publicly owned land. As the events of last Friday night in Merredin move forward, there will be an inquiry into what happened. I am very saddened to hear that someone has been charged and that will take its process through the courts. That makes the point that there is a chain of responsibility when hunting is conducted on freehold land with permission. I do not see how we will have that chain of responsibility should this system be moved onto public lands and impact upon other users of public land. Permission will be required through the trial, but it will be very difficult to enforce, to police and to administer—and it will be costly.

Hon Rick Mazza: Why's that?

Hon DARREN WEST: It will be costly. I think the inquiry shows that the system in New South Wales, which the committee majority report is planning to implement, is going to be under cost recovery. I do not think there was any doubt about that in evidence that we heard, so there will be a cost. There will also be a cost to all the agencies, and that was the main reason that the agencies were not in favour of such a trial going forward, because they could see the impact on their budgets. It would be those agencies, such as the Department of Parks and Wildlife and the Department of Lands that would have to go out and administer this system should it be adopted on a broader scale than a trial only. I thought it was making the point that, yes, there has been a recent misfortune, but it is in no way related to the work of the committee. It underlines the dangers that those who use firearms face and that people must be careful, diligent and vigilant.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I thank the Standing Committee on Public Administration for producing the report, which is very interesting. I have read it quite comprehensively. I have also taken time to listen to today's debate, because I am interested to find out more to see whether recreational hunting systems on public land are a good idea. I do not have a concluded opinion about it, but I am happy to listen to arguments and make an assessment based on the best evidence available. I was not necessarily going to make a contribution, but just a moment ago Hon Darren West said that we should not in any way confuse the tragic accident—I should say incident, because we are yet to know the circumstances surrounding what happened—on Friday night in the wheatbelt with the subject matter of the report because they are two separate issues. On that I agree with Hon Darren West. However, I do recall that on Monday, because my memory is relatively good, especially about things that have happened in the last couple of days, tuning into ABC radio—I listen to the ABC from time to time—to listen to the Geoff Hutchison program. He led with a statement that said that the sad events of Friday night raise questions about the ability of people to know what they are doing if indeed they will have access to hunt on crown land. That was his introduction to an interview with Hon Darren West, who went on to talk at length about the committee's work and the report. There was Hon Darren West trying to link this report with the incident of Friday morning.

Withdrawal of Remark

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Hon DARREN WEST: The member is deliberately misleading the house. I did an interview with Geoff Hutchison. I hope that the member reads the transcript, because I went to great pains when I was on the program to distinguish the two events. I ask the member to withdraw the reference to linking the inquiry and the accident.

The CHAIR: Hon Peter Katsambanis, would you like to respond to that?

Hon Peter Katsambanis: No.

The CHAIR: Can I just say that based on precedent rulings on this matter that Hon Peter Katsambanis, from his understanding, put forward his point of view about the interview. Hon Darren West can make a personal statement to correct anything said by another member with which he does not agree. He can do that at any point. I think that that is a more appropriate way to proceed on this issue.

Debate Resumed

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: It is interesting that I was interrupted before I had time to conclude, make a statement or even allude to what Hon Darren West said in the interview with Geoff Hutchison. The fact is he was at pains to say he did not want to link the inquiry's report with the incident. He said that, but there he was talking about it in relation to the shooting incident. He wanted to do that; that is his right.

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I will tell the Leader of the Opposition what he said if she will give me the opportunity.

The CHAIR: Order, members! The continual exchange across the chamber does not help the member who has the call and who is making a contribution. This is a time-limited debate because each member has a maximum of only 30 minutes. I ask that members take that into consideration and let the honourable member make his contribution in silence.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I do not intend to take the whole 30 minutes available—hopefully. Hon Darren West was at pains to say that he did not want to link the two issues—the inquiry with the incident—but he made a statement that really got to me and prompted me to get to my feet. He said that he thought that there were some bizarre findings in the report. I read the report; nothing stood out to me as being bizarre, but I went back to it. I wondered why a member of a committee would describe the committee's report as having bizarre findings. The majority of findings—there are only 10, the last five of which relate to very complicated issues about native title, some of which have been ventilated throughout this debate—are not in any way bizarre; rather, they deal with a complex subject matter and point out the very complex issues that will have to be dealt with if the one recommendation of the report is implemented. That is pretty logical and not bizarre to me. I will go through the first five findings. The first finding reads —

... should a recreational hunting system be adopted in Western Australia, an independent risk manager should be engaged prior to its implementation.

That is pretty sensible. It does not say that a recreational system should be introduced but if it is introduced, there is the need for independent risk management. That is very sensible and not bizarre at all. The second finding was —

The online booking and GPS systems used in New South Wales are extremely helpful in managing risks of hunting.

The committee obviously looked at the New South Wales system and made a finding that the use of those systems in New South Wales are helpful in managing risks. That is not a bizarre finding at all. The third finding was —

The Committee finds that there are long standing, well-established systems for recreational hunting in other jurisdictions.

As the report points out, and as we have heard in the debate, both Victoria and New South Wales have longstanding, well-established systems. The majority of the committee tells us that those systems work relatively well. Again, that is not a bizarre finding; indeed, it is quite a factual finding. The fourth finding was —

The Committee finds that there is a lack of conclusive data on the effectiveness or otherwise of recreational hunting as a form of feral animal control. There is a reliance on either small scale scientific studies or anecdotal evidence or speculation to inform conclusions on both sides of the debate.

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That is not a bizarre finding at all. I do not want to put words into anyone's mouth, but I think that might be a statement with which Hon Darren West would agree.

Hon Rick Mazza: You have to go to the minority report for the bizarre findings!

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I will get there, Hon Rick Mazza!

The fifth finding was —

... that there is an inconsistent approach by Department of Parks and Wildlife to engaging recreational hunters in organised and targeted feral animal management across different regions.

Again, I do not see anything bizarre in that. It has been identified that the Department of Parks and Wildlife has different approaches in different regions, which happens from time to time. It is an important finding for the ongoing improvement of Department of Parks and Wildlife when engaging with recreational hunters in organised and targeted feral animal management across all the regions of Western Australia. There is nothing bizarre about that. The last five of the 10 findings deal with the complexity of native title. I thought about looking at the findings of the minority report, as Hon Rick Mazza pointed out, but I thought there would be little value in that because I doubt any member would describe their own findings, the ones they put their name to, as being bizarre, and I will not attribute that to any member. Why would someone go out and publicly call these findings that some of us might not like bizarre? Some of us might not like the direction they are headed in, but they are certainly not bizarre in any way. According to my notes, Hon Darren West said to Geoff Hutchison that he thought —

The New South Wales GPS tracking system seems like a great idea, and sadly I was unable to go and see it firsthand.

Several members interjected.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Look, he did not get a chance to go; that is fair enough. Members of Parliament have many competing obligations and it was very difficult for all committee members to go out and have a look at it, but he did say it seems like a good idea.

Hon Ken Travers: What else did he say?

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: But that is what the majority report stated.

As I said, I have read this report, and I remain somewhat sceptical, in the fairest sense of the word, about whether, long term, recreational hunting on public lands to control feral animals will work. Nothing in the report tells me that it will conclusively work or that it is the best system and the best idea. I think that is pretty fair; I think most people say that. Finding 4 that I read out before was that there was a lack of conclusive data anyway. I think almost everyone in Western Australia—not just the people in this place but almost anyone who knows what is going on in Western Australia—knows that the control of feral animals on public land is a major issue. An idea has been advanced, perhaps kicked off by one member of Parliament and then looked at by a committee, as to how we could possibly start addressing some of the issues around feral animal control. The committee has come up with a logical and sensible recommendation—not a bizarre recommendation—and 10 logical and sensible findings. I suggest that rather than members of Parliament taking cheap pot shots at the findings and recommendation of the committee, we put that issue of the control of feral animals first to protect our fragile environment, and possibly look at implementing the recommendation with the provisos, checks and balances and controls that the committee has recommended.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral) [3.33 pm]: I rise to make some brief remarks on the twenty-third report of the Standing Committee on Public Administration. As a member for the Mining and Pastoral Region in this place, the report alludes to trials possibly taking place in my electorate. I want to touch on two elements of the report this afternoon. One relates to the existing use of shooting in pest animal management. Page 38 of the report contains a number of paragraphs about this issue. Look, there are some programs in place in this state already. I know from the report, but also from my time spent in the offices of Ministers for Environment, that there are programs in place and existing partnerships with a range of recreational shooting organisations that allow recreational shooters to take part in organised culls of pest animals. I do not think—this report states it also—the Department of Parks and Wildlife has always lived up to the spirit of that policy. This report also mentions that some DPaW officers around the state are very good on this issue, and that others are not so good.

Point of Order

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: As chair of the committee I am really, really interested to hear the contribution of Hon Stephen Dawson. All around the chamber there seem to be a whole lot of conversations going on and I am

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having difficulty hearing the honourable member's contribution. I was wondering if the Chair could just perhaps bring the chamber to a bit of order.

The CHAIR: Members, I am sure you all heard the comments of Hon Liz Behjat. It is important that we observe the member who has the call in silence, so I give the call to Hon Stephen Dawson.

Debate Resumed

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will also speak up. I think I was speaking quietly; I will certainly speak loudly so that people can hear me this afternoon. I appreciate the interjection, and I appreciate that Hon Liz Behjat is listening to my comments.

I was saying, honourable member, that there is a DPaW policy in place at the moment that allows recreational hunters or shooters to participate in organised culls around the state. The other point I was making is that I do not believe that DPaW always lives up to the spirit of that policy. I know as a matter of fact that some DPaW officers around the state have been better at working with people like the Sporting Shooters' Association and other associations to ensure that licensed shooters have been able to take part in organised culls, but I know that others have not. It is my personal view that this is an area the government should look further and more deeply into.

I say from the outset that I do not support the recommendation of the majority of the committee. I do not believe a public case has been made to allow for what the recommendation is suggesting. However, I recognise that feral animals are a massive issue for this state in some electorates such as mine and that of Hon Nigel Hallett and others. There is no doubt that there has to be a better coordinated response to the tackling of feral animals. I believe that DPaW, as a major landholder, has to play a bigger role. It has to work with local landowners and farmers to ensure that government is tackling the issue of feral animals around the state. It is not just a DPaW issue, in fairness; I think the Department of Agriculture and Food has to do a lot more in this space, too. I am not having a go at the government or ministers or anyone, I am just saying that our agencies have to do more in this space. I hear it, I am sure Hon Rick Mazza hears it from his constituents, I am sure Hon Darren West, if he was in this place, would acknowledge that he hears it from his constituents: feral animals are a massive, massive problem. They cause a massive headache for farmers, and this problem has to be tackled. I recognise that that was probably part of Hon Rick Mazza's thinking in relation to getting such a committee inquiry happening. I do not want to put words into the mouth of Hon Rick Mazza, but I suspect that was part of the consideration for getting an inquiry like this off the ground. That is a very valid concern to have, but I do not think the recommendation in this report is the right one. Before we go there, I think that with a bit of goodwill and leadership by ministers, we could ensure that the Department of Parks and Wildlife is properly engaging with groups like the Sporting Shooters' Association of Western Australia or the Western Australian Field and Game Association because I think we have existing policy in place that could allow for more recreational shooting but in organised culls around the state. I just wanted to make that point. I do not think the departments are doing all they could at the moment, and I think it is an area the government should focus on.

The other point I wanted to make relates to tourism. I have to say that unlike other members in this place, I do not believe this issue is the saviour of Aboriginal people in the regions. I do not believe there are groups of Aboriginal people calling out for the ability to be able to take safaris out onto their land and to have people from all around the world flying in to shoot animals because it will take them out of poverty.

I want to make a point about tourism. Pages 57, 58 and 59 of this twenty-third report of the Standing Committee on Public Administration include some sections about tourism. I particularly want to highlight the comments from Stephanie Buckland, the CEO of Tourism Western Australia. I will not read them out because I do not want to use up all my time this afternoon. She said that Tourism WA is not in favour of the recommendations in this report, although she had commented before the recommendations came out. She said that Tourism WA's view is that nature-based tourism is more valuable to this state than any organised shooting parties would be. She quotes some figures in this report.

Hon Liz Behjat: The minister told her we were going to have a trial. She does not make policy; she acts on advice from government.

Hon Sue Ellery: She gives advice and her advice is don't do it.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Members, someone has had a go already and others can have a go after me. Hon Liz Behjat can seek the call from the Chair; I want to make my comments this afternoon. Tourism WA is not in favour of this issue. Tourism is a massive earner for this state; it is worth \$8 billion to the Western Australian economy. It employs 91 000 people in the state, so it is very important to this state's economy. I am a supporter of nature-based tourism in this state and I do not want to see any other policy or a recommendation from this report negatively impact on our tourism industry. Tourism is a very valuable

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industry to my electorate and I do not want to see that sector negatively impacted. With those brief comments, I certainly do not support the recommendations of the committee.

I recognise that there is an issue with feral animals in this state and with the Department of Parks and Wildlife not living up to the policy in relation to organised culls, so I urge the government to show a bit of leadership and make sure that the department works with groups such as the Sporting Shooters' Association of Western Australia and deer and game shooters to allow organised culls.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [3.42 pm]: I read with a great deal of interest the Standing Committee on Public Administration's twenty-third report on recreational hunting systems. For many people in Western Australia, I am sure the suggestion that we adopt the approach proposed by Hon Rick Mazza would have been one to greet with an element of disbelief and objection. I am sure that in many people's experience it is a novel suggestion that government get involved in permitting, and arguably encouraging, people to get themselves involved in shooting feral pests for recreational purposes. I notice as an aside that in the explanatory material contained in the report, various jurisdictions have different definitions of feral. They have used the term "pest". It would be an interesting concept to consider if we were talking about what a pest is, particularly when we contemplate shooting them! That is perhaps something we do not need to resolve at this point in time.

The committee's report took us to New South Wales and Victoria and invited us to contemplate the situation here in Western Australia. When it all boils down, having made a number of pertinent findings, it can be seen that the overall recommendation of the majority of the committee is that there be a limited trial of a hunting system so that we can evaluate whether it really would work. There is no shortage of people around the town who will tell us that it will not work and there is no shortage of people who will tell us it is an essential and desirable initiative. Having had the benefit of a committee inquiry and this report, we are now saying we will really only find out if we try it and see.

The majority of the committee provides a range of findings that establish some parameters and some important considerations before government contemplates going ahead with a trial, or something like it, in a couple of widely separated areas. I am sure that anyone following this debate will be aware of some of the potential pitfalls, including potential harm to protected or non-pest fauna, potential hazards to human beings and so on. But in contemplating trialling it, any responsible committee would highlight some of these problems. The government has an interesting challenge in contemplating this report and responding in due course. We look forward to no doubt revisiting that issue when the government decides what its response will be.

Hon Rick Mazza has again brought forward in a way that only he can, a matter that is uniquely his own as a member, for progressing in this case as a co-opted member of the Standing Committee on Public Administration. It is to his credit that he is making an impact on what goes on in this Parliament, as is the Public Administration Committee, the diligence of which has again been exhibited under the capable chairmanship of Hon Liz Behjat. I am sure we all acknowledge that, whether or not we agree with the findings and recommendations of the report. I think it is a little unfortunate when minority reports are attached to committee reports, but in this case I am not surprised. Even having heard much of the same evidence—I presume all the members of the committee heard the same evidence—members might have come to different conclusions but in this case I guess it is a thorny issue to tackle. Full marks anyway to members, notably, the chair of the committee and Hon Rick Mazza for having the courage to tackle it.

I will not offer a view about what I really think about all this.

Hon Ken Travers: First time for everything.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I might obliquely drop a few hints though. I am an animal lover and I appreciate the qualities of our environment. That is why I also understand that feral pests pose a very great threat to our native fauna and, indeed, to the terrestrial environment. Something has to be done when feral pests are taking over, whether they be cats, dogs, camels, wild horses or whatever it might be. The fact is that these feral pests, even wild dogs, can cause massive damage to stock and so on. It is not pretty, but as a society we sometimes have to deal with that unfortunate situation. Feral pests have to be dealt with whether by shooting camels from the air or having to bait cats, for example, in the very successful Western Shield program of recent years. It is not nice that we have to kill animals that are feral pests, but it is what we have to sometimes do, so we have to work out how we will go about it, which is something else that has been offered to the debate.

In closing, it occurs to me that this is also an interesting area of public debate that stirs up a lot of passion. It is interesting to note that since we last considered this report, we have had a number of shooting incidents in a hunting context—a monument to bad timing some might say, or others might say, "Well, that just goes to show you." In all of that, I wonder if any members here have exhausted their allocation of three lots of speaking for up to 10 minutes and might have something further to add. I wonder whether, when we receive the government's

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response, everyone will be able to revisit this in the flexible manner that they may wish to. If the answer to any of that, Madam Chair—before you sit me down for irrelevance—is no, then I will just say, “I told you so.” But our standing orders have made a lurch in the right direction by giving a greater capacity for us to canvass these matters because this committee put a helluva lot of work into this matter and we need to do it justice. Thanks very much and I am glad I had the opportunity to speak on this for the first time.

HON MARK LEWIS (Mining and Pastoral) [3.52 pm]: I rise to give some personal experience to this issue. Before I do that, I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Public Administration and Hon Rick Mazza for bringing the debate into this place. It is a matter worthy of debate and a debate that Western Australia needs. The eastern states, to some degree, have already had this debate. In some cases they probably did not even need to have the debate because it happened organically. As I said, I will provide members with some personal experience on the matter. When I was living in Queensland, we had three pastoral properties in south west Queensland that had a significant pig problem. If members have had anything to do with pigs, they will know that they can be extremely damaging and nasty to the young lambs and adult sheep at times too. However, they also have a significant impact on the environment, particularly the riverine environment. Two of those three places had rivers running through them. A person could not ride a motorbike up and down those two major river systems—the Warrego River and the Paroo River—because of what is called “pig rooting” up and down the riverine system. When feral pigs get out of control, significant damage occurs to not only animal welfare, but also the environment. One of those three pastoral properties surrounded the town of Wyandra, which is between Cunnamulla and Charleville—it happened to be along the bitumen between the two towns. As part of our practice, we used to constantly try to destroy as many pigs as we could, but at the end of the day it became a bit overwhelming and we had other things to do because we were running three places. We thought about a commercial solution and set up a registered chiller box on this place surrounding the towns. It became a commercial venture in its own right and gave not only professional shooters but also non-professional shooters—who were part of sporting clubs and whatever around the place—permission to come onto our places at least and to all the surrounding places where the pigs were a significant problem. From my perspective, this is worth a trial. The debate was had over east years ago, and the committee’s report noted that in New South Wales. However, in Queensland this is quite a common and not unusual practice. Chiller boxes are spread right throughout western Queensland. They take in feral animals from not only private properties, but also crown land. I am not sure whether the committee got to see the Queensland version, but it is a very simple process to go into crown land and to destroy feral animals.

I do not want to take up any more time. When there is a high density of feral animals and significant environmental damage, it is worth considering a trial in the fashion recommended by the committee. I support the committee’s recommendation for a trial that I would hold in areas of high environmental damage, with animal welfare issues and pest-related problems. Given my personal background and experience in this matter, I thought I would put that on the table, and I commend the committee’s report to the house.

Question put and passed.

Progress reported, pursuant to temporary orders.