



**Submission to the Standing Committee on Public Administration
Inquiry into Recreational Hunting Systems in Western Australia**

The Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia (DAFWA) has the primary responsibility for administration of the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* in Western Australia. DAFWA acknowledges the opportunity provided to consider the options of recreational hunting systems and their potential benefits and impacts in managing pests.

Professional hunters are employed by regional industry or community groups through strategic, coordinated landscape-wide programs to manage pest animals. Additionally, DAFWA has staff members with professional marksman capability for specific pest animal control programs (e.g. feral camel control) where there are no suitable private options to provide this service.

Use of recreational hunting systems for pest management

The aims of pest management programs do not align well with the aims of recreational hunting systems. Pest management programs aim to reduce the numbers of pests to a level that has minimal impact on agriculture and the environment while taking into account cost effectiveness. An objective of recreational hunting systems is to maintain a population of target animals to allow hunting. Orueta and Aranda (2001) cited the management of non-native ungulates, such as deer, in New Zealand as an example of this conflict in objectives.

In Australia, the inconsistent objectives of pest management and recreational hunting systems are illustrated in recreational hunting systems in Victoria. It is widely accepted that feral deer impact on environmental and agricultural assets. In Victoria, six deer species are listed as a game animal, which are protected under Victorian legislation except during the hunting seasons. The Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries website describes the objectives of maintaining populations of game animals to ensure sustainable hunting opportunities. In particular, the website states "*Game hunting in Victoria is regulated to provide sustainable recreational hunting opportunities while ensuring the future of game species, protecting their habitats and ensuring the humane and ethical treatment of game species*". These objectives are inconsistent with the aims of pest management programs.

A high proportion of pest animals have to be culled to effectively control and maintain a low population in the long term. The Victorian Institute of Animal Science Vertebrate Pest Research Department's report (2003) on the "Evaluation of the 2002/03 Victorian Fox Bounty Trial" states that a "*sustained annual population reduction of more than 65% would be a realistic goal before fox populations could be expected to decline across Victoria*". Recreational hunting is unlikely to achieve that level of reduction in pests. The potential benefit to pest control of recreational hunting would be short-term as the numbers of pests culled will not be sufficient to maintain a low number of pests in the long term.

Costs and benefits of a recreational hunting system to the agricultural community

The risks and costs of a recreational hunting system outweigh the economic benefits of the system to the agriculture community. Hunters may facilitate feral animal re-location into additional hunting areas which could impact on agricultural industries. In south-west Western Australia, a study on the genetics of feral pigs by Spencer and Hampton (2005) showed similarities between the genetics of feral pigs in different locations separated by large distances. The paper suggests that "*individuals have been deliberately and illegally translocated to supplement recreational hunting stocks*".

Orueta and Aranda (2001), citing Uphan (1980), noted that "*under particular circumstances, hunting pressure could force these animal to disperse into wider areas faster than they would do with natural mechanisms*". To avoid recreational hunting pressure on public land, pest animals may escape to private agriculture land bordering public land and impact on livestock and other agricultural assets.

Recreational hunters often hunt with dogs. These hunting dogs present a risk to livestock if they enter private agricultural land. They are also of concern with respect to animal welfare. Anecdotal evidence (quoted in Booth, 2009) submitted to *Farm Online* on a story about wild dog problems in 2009 outline the concern for farmers on the issue of hunting dogs that escape or become lost.

Unregulated movements of recreational hunters and hunting dogs increase the risk of weed spread on public land. Weed seed can be spread through mud on footwear and vehicles and adherence to clothing of hunters and coats of hunting dogs as they move from weed-infested areas into other non-infested areas.

Best practice pest management

The best practice approach to pest management encourages integrated, landscape-wide, well-planned and coordinated programs. Pest animals are highly adaptable and mobile. Programs that do not incorporate these principles are unlikely to be cost effective as the impacts may be short term and limited to a small area.

DAFWA is involved in programs to control pest animals such as wild dogs, feral camels and feral pigs. DAFWA is taking a community coordinated approach to managing pest animals. This is done through working with the five recognised biosecurity groups in the pastoral region and with pest animal control groups in the south-west agricultural region to develop coordinated, long-term programs that take into account different landscape values. Recreational hunting may disrupt and impact on the success of these programs because objectives of these two activities do not align well.

A successful recreational hunting system to control pest animals will require the establishment of a comprehensive governance, licensing and regulation regime. There are costs associated with setting up and running the system. In New South Wales, the Game Council received \$2.6million from the government and \$1.2million from licensing fees in the 2011/12 financial year (Dunn *et al.*, 2012). The Game Council was suspended in July 2013 due to issues with governance. The NSW government is currently in the process of resurrecting the recreational hunting system. The cost associated with this process has not been quantified.

If the aim is to manage pests, DAFWA considers that the cost required to set up a recreational hunting system will be better utilised in the implementation of integrated, landscape-wide and coordinated pest management programs in accordance with best practice.

Impacts on animal welfare

One of the major issues facing pest management programs is the concern that animal welfare will be compromised. Major pest animal control programs, such as the recent cull of feral horses at Lake Gregory in the Kimberley region and the National Feral Camel Management program, are audited by independent veterinarians to ensure that the animals were killed humanely. This level of animal welfare consideration would be difficult to include in recreational hunting systems, and could put at risk the current pest animal control operations due to public concern.

The Pest Animal Control Ethics Advisory Committee (PACEAC) was established to advise DAFWA on the ethics of pest animal control programs. PACEAC considers that there is a high risk that animal welfare will be compromised in a recreational hunting system. The *Animal Welfare Act 2002* (AW Act) provides a defence against animal cruelty for the "usual and reasonable" killing of pests. The Committee recently endorsed six guiding principles of what it considers "usual and reasonable" killing of pests, which applies to the killing of pests not covered under a code of practice or other animal welfare guidelines. PACEAC has advised DAFWA that it would be difficult to regulate adherence to these guiding principles, codes of practice or other animal welfare guidelines.

References

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