

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

**INQUIRY INTO THE POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL
CONTRIBUTION OF RECREATIONAL HUNTING SYSTEMS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 18 JUNE 2014**

SESSION THREE

Members

Hon Liz Behjat (Chairman)
Hon Darren West (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Nigel Hallett
Hon Jacqui Boydell
Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson
Hon Rick Mazza (Co-opted member)

Hearing commenced at 10.54 am**Mr ROBERT DELANE****Director General, Department of Agriculture and Food, sworn and examined:****Mr VIV READ****Acting Executive Director, Invasive Species, Department of Agriculture and Food, sworn and examined:****Ms I-LYN LOO****Senior Policy Officer, Invasive Species, Department of Agriculture and Food, sworn and examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome you to this meeting. Just before we begin, if we could just start from the left, you can choose to take either the oath or the affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

The CHAIRMAN: You will have signed a document entitled “Information for Witnesses”. Have you read and understood that document?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you refer to during the course of this hearing for the record. Please also be aware of the microphones and try to talk directly into them. Ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make noise near them and try to speak in turn if one or more of you is answering a question. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today’s proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

That is the formal part from your point of view. You have introduced yourself to us; it is only fair that we introduce ourselves to you that so you know the people that you are appearing in front of today. Starting from my left is the Hon Rick Mazza, who represents the Agricultural Region; Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson, representing the East Metropolitan Region; Hon Darren West, also representing the Agricultural Region. I am the chair, Liz Behjat, representing North Metropolitan Region; our advisory officer Dr Julia Lawrinson; Hon Nigel Hallett, representing the South West Region; and Hon Jacqui Boydell, representing the Mining and Pastoral Region. The only region you do not have here is south metropolitan and really that does not matter! I do not really mean that. You have got a good cross-section of all the regions of Western Australia. We do have your submission that you have made to the inquiry but is there an opening statement, Rob, that you might like to make to the committee in support of your submission?

Mr Delane: Thank you, chair. It is great to see so much interest in this topic. I think you have a submission that we almost made. I think our submission arrived late and was not accepted.

The CHAIRMAN: Your submission was late, was it not? That is right, she says, looking over the top her glasses!

Mr Delane: Sorry, I have got to do that all the time, chair. Obviously, we are happy for the committee to use our submission if it so chooses. Just a couple of brief opening comments really.

The CHAIRMAN: So you have your submission with you today, I am assuming? You will need to actually table that for us if you want us to consider that today.

Mr Delane: We will table a copy of that so that it is with you. Just a couple of brief comments—clearly, non-native animals, invasive species or animal pests, as they are generally referred to, of which there is quite a range—wild dogs and cats, horses camels, deer, goats, buffalo et cetera—are causing significant damage to parts of Western Australia in environmental and agricultural and sometimes cultural context. We and agencies like DPaW et cetera have clear roles in trying to address that. Clearly, there is very strong interest from recreational hunters to be able to play some role in relation to those animals and, on the surface of that, that would seem to be a sensible proposition under appropriate rules and constraints. In the broadest terms our view is along the lines that if operating under same standards and sorts of procedures that DAFWA and other agencies operate in carrying out humane killing of such pests, then a case might be made for this activity to occur. But the issues involved are significant and the specific detail is important both on a pest basis but a whole range of areas. There are plenty of questions of which the committee members are well aware—public safety, environmental impact, disease point of view, from water catchment point of view, property rights issues. But the two areas that we at DAFWA have direct legislative responsibility for and significant operational programs are in relation to biosecurity and animal welfare.

[11.00 am]

We are involved in a range of strategies and clearly policy regulation operations in relation to a range of animal pests and have or do carry out control programs for camels, donkeys, horses, goats, wild dogs, sometimes pigs, cattle and buffalo, in specific circumstances, and deer, and a range of bird pests. Those species, of course, have varying interest to recreational hunters. Our principal responsibilities are managed under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act and under the Animal Welfare Act, both of which have quite a lot of detail, which is relevant to this area. That is probably enough introduction, chair. I am really open to questions from the committee as the best way to get to the critical issues.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I will kick off, if you like. In states like Victoria and New South Wales, it is actually the agriculture department equivalent—I think they are calling themselves the Department of Primary Industries—that manage the licensing system in those states. Is that something that you have looked into and maybe considered how you would be able to implement it?

Mr Delane: The others may well comment, but clearly some licensing system is the only effective way to manage this and being able to do that efficiently and effectively will be essential. Clearly, a number of agencies have got the capability to be able to do that. Ours is one of them. There are circumstances where what is sought by recreational hunters can and does occur now where all the key elements of the landowners land ownership and approvals of occupational health and safety et cetera are all reasonably addressed. But there are also plenty of situations of which our field officers are well aware where there are very few controls in place and the situation is quite untenable. We have looked around and Mr Read can give us some more detail on that. If the government, Parliament, decided the system could be implemented, then we will do our job.

Mr Read: I will just supplement by saying that we are well aware of the Victorian licensing system. We have not fully considered it here for Western Australia. The option would be to link with, partner with, established and recognised biosecurity groups in some situations. The requirement for licensing through those arrangements could be looked at.

Hon RICK MAZZA: What would the cost to the department be each year for managing pest animals?

Mr Read: The total cost for the program that is dedicated for pest animal control and weed control is about \$5.7 million with some extra external up to \$6.3 million.

The CHAIRMAN: I notice here in your submission to us on the impacts on animal welfare that you say that 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. I also note in the quick look at your submission here that you have looked at other systems that are in place in other states, in particular in New South Wales. Are you aware of how they deal with the animal welfare considerations in New South Wales? Is that problem for them?

Mr Read: I am not specifically aware—I am broadly aware, nationally, through the Vertebrate Pests Committee, and they would be adhering to the national model codes of practice, which directly address humaneness of killing and all. I would be certain that New South Wales would be endorsing those, as we intend to do here in Western Australia.

The CHAIRMAN: In anything that I have read, I am not seeing that there is a major issue with animal welfare in those states where there is currently recreational hunting, but you seem to hold that out as being quite a major concern. Do you think it would be different in Western Australia than in other states?

Mr Delane: I think the detail is important here. Camels were referred to in the earlier discussion with the officers of DPaW. Camels are extremely difficult animals to control; can really only be effectively controlled, certainly in any number, with aerial shooting from helicopters. There has been quite a lot of work done in this area, and an enormous amount of work done within my department to ensure that that is carried out humanely.

The CHAIRMAN: I think now we are going to try to round them up and ship them out, are we not? I think that is probably a better outcome.

Mr Delane: If that can be achieved humanely and economically, that will be a great outcome. But at the moment, they are in very remote areas, they are widely spread, they are large and difficult-to-kill animals, and we carry that out with expert helicopter pilots, expert marksmen, with special firearms, with on-ground monitoring to ensure that we are in fact carrying out humane control et cetera, and there has been professional studies that show that in fact it is the skills of the marksman that is critical in that; so opening up to recreational shooters for camel control could have a lot of animal welfare issues. We have run recently—Mr Read can give details on a very large horse control program that has had a lot of contentious issues around it. We were able to run a very effective and humane program that controlled thousands of horses, but these issues are not without their detractors of anyone carrying out control of horses; and so if recreational hunters could then be able to go and do this without interest from horse supporters and human animal supporters, then they are deluding themselves. These are very difficult paths to tread and they are difficult operations to carry out; so if the hunters believe they can make a serious contribution to invasive species control, then you have to deal with numbers and you have to deal with large numbers. If they want to shoot the odd animal, then that is a different set of circumstances, but they should not mix the two.

The CHAIRMAN: I think that is where your submission clearly does state: that there is a big difference between the recreational hunting and pest control and that we should be mindful of that in our considerations of what we are doing.

Mr Delane: With most of these animals, unless you are controlling a very significant proportion of the animals across a large area at any one time, you will not make serious inroads into the population. We have been shooting donkeys from helicopters for over 30 years in very large cumulative numbers; we have had very effective Judas collaring of donkeys and we now have a

world-standard successful program. But you cannot control donkey populations by shooting the odd one here or there; you have to have whole-of-landscape programs, running across thousands of square kilometres.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I was just wondering where you suggested that the risks and costs of recreational hunting outweigh the economic benefits. I was wondering how recently was that looked at. Has it been very current or is it a few years ago? Also, in recent weeks we have had the Victorian government coming out now, putting up a very strong case for recreational hunting there and clearly showing the economic benefit to the state. Where do you guys sit on that?

Mr Read: Well, it is not something that we have any Australian statistics for, but there is a recent study, 2014, in wildlife research which can be available to members—we can make it available—that does try to quantify for Australia for the first time, as I understand it, the economic benefits and contribution. We can comment on the impacts that could be reduced, but that would be reasonably subjective, but the impact reduction required is substantial and our view is that the contribution of recreational hunting in agricultural areas is a small proportion of that.

[11.10 am]

The CHAIRMAN: I would be good to get a copy of that report. Is that report publicly available?

Mr Read: It is publicly available. We have copies of the Finch report—no, we can make it available.

Mr Delane: We will submit that to the committee.

Hon RICK MAZZA: What was the name of that report?

Mr Read: I have a copy here. I will read the title: “Expenditure and motivation of Australian recreational hunters”. It is the first attempt at putting some science around the issues; and it is in Wildlife Research 2014.

The CHAIRMAN: In fact, members, I think we have a copy of it.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Is it a CSIRO report?

Mr Delane: You do have a copy of it.

Mr Read: Yes, that is the one.

The CHAIRMAN: It was just presented to us this morning.

Mr Read: I did. You sent it to me. I think they already had it.

Mr Delane: I mean, chair, clearly foxes are an example where, if you like, hunters on the ground, it makes a big difference when you have major a coordinated program, and a red card for the red fox through baiting and shooting, and a concentrated effort across many landscapes is a very effective program but it is a coordinated control program that includes recreational shooters and landholders as opposed to a recreational shooting program.

The CHAIRMAN: And I think also as was pointed out in an earlier hearing, by my colleague here, what I do not think I was really aware of is that there are some feral animals that are not going to respond to shooting—dogs, for instance, you do not shoot dogs; you bait them, I guess.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Trap them.

The CHAIRMAN: Trap them or bait them.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Sorry, chair, just on that subject—with the dog bounty program you have got going at the moment, I think at the estimates hearings you mentioned 109 dogs was the last reported; were they all shot?

Mr Read: There is no record that we are aware of as to whether they were shot or not. They might have been shot or trapped—probably not baited because it is hard to get the scalp for that, but it would be either shot or trapped.

Hon DARREN WEST: Along a similar vein, I think we have probably got the answer, but I will ask the question anyway. I was really keen to know what other species it would be best—I asked the same question to DPaW—which species would be specifically the best ones in your view to engage recreational shooters and hold such programs?

Mr Delane: Perhaps we might both comment, chair.

Hon DARREN WEST: Perhaps some more suitable —

Mr Delane: Ones which are practical?

Hon DARREN WEST: Yes, more suitable.

Mr Delane: Clearly, with appropriate marksmen and firearms, and when you can control large animals such as camels, donkeys and horses, but these tend to in Western Australia occur in quite remote areas across very large landscapes; whereas in parts of eastern Australia there are in fact horses, and animals such as that, quite close to population areas and there are a different set of issues there; but all of those can be controlled. I mean, our people who are very expert in this area are able to effectively and humanely control them. Goats, clearly, can be hunted, and there are plenty of those spread across a large landscape and they continue to do significant damage. We used to have helicopter programs controlling those at one point, but I think we stopped that program in about 1999 or 2000; it just was not cost-effective. Foxes, others—there is a lot of interest in deer, of which we thankfully have very few in Western Australia, and hopefully the native poison plants continue to limit their numbers. There is a lot of interest in pigs, which is a very messy area and can do a lot of damage environmentally, but the human–pig interaction can also cause a lot of issues. Mr Read is aware of circumstances where pig hunters cause perhaps more problems than they are ever going to solve.

Hon DARREN WEST: If I can keep on going. The other one I was curious to flesh out a little bit out with you was, we have heard from the Department of Lands this morning, and we have also heard from DPaW as you are aware, and I just was curious to know how the sort of—DPaW told us they had a MOU with lands to control animals in certain areas, and clearly you have animal eradication programs too. I am just sort of curious to know how the agencies interact. Who decides who does what? How does it all work? What engagement? Do you operate clearly on freehold, agricultural land, but also on pastoral lands, which comes under the Department of Lands? How do those arrangements work?

Mr Delane: I think, operationally, Mr Read might comment, but we have very little land so we do not have the responsibilities that DPaW or the Department of Lands has. We have a regulatory responsibility but we do enter into a partnership with recognised biosecurity groups in the rangelands and we do carry out, and have carried out for many, many years previously through the Agriculture Protection Board but since 1995 approximately through the Department of Agriculture and Food in its various guises, major programs against major pests—so, donkeys for example; major co-funded programs, camels; major co-funded, usually nationally funded programs et cetera. So we have tended to play a role where there are major coordinated programs. For a long period of time, our staffing ability in these areas has been declining, so we have played less of a role in, for example, foxes and dogs and the like in agricultural areas. We used to have a major role with rabbits and we have tended to wind back from that and leave that responsibility where it has legally always sat, which is with the landholders. We help coordinate those groups and now we play more of a supporting role. We work very closely with DPaW, and always have, to make sure that we have coordinated programs and sometimes that works extremely well. The committee will be aware that

sometimes there are risks involved in aerial control programs, for example, and there has been an unfortunate accident associated with that as well.

Hon DARREN WEST: Would you have any situations, then, under the animals that you control to engage in such a program where you would get in touch with the Sporting Shooters Association or Field and Game and bring in some of their members who can provide that on-the-ground extra resource, or is that not an area that you would work in?

Mr Delane: I think we really start from the need that most of these animals should be controlled across the landscape. They are very mobile and if you are controlling them only in very small pockets, then you may well be hunting but you will not be controlling them. But there will be parts, including of the very vast landscapes of the rangelands, where a well-organised program, with all the appropriate approvals and processes in place, where recreational shooters with the approval of the appropriate landholders et cetera could be a very valuable adjunct to a broader control program. But I expect it will be an adjunct to a control program because they simply could not get across enough land to be able to really control large numbers. Theoretically, it is possible that you could have recreational hunters operating from helicopters and the like, as they do, but this is a specialised role and our people who do this are vastly experienced and highly skilled.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I have just one brief question. You mentioned earlier about the unwanted activities of pig hunters. Would you consider that a structured and regulated system may actually reduce the incidence of some pig hunters doing the wrong thing or illegally hunting pigs in certain areas?

Mr Read: There is a structured approach to pig hunting through biosecurity groups—Lake Muir is one example—but there are forces acting against them. They have encountered—so I have heard anecdotally—death threats for the operations they undertake and in other places further north, there are, through anecdotes, suggestions of public intimidation and property damage. So it would be a difficult task, in my view, to provide a structured approach that would encompass all of that. The groups that exist do actually employ people who are well trained, are well aware of the requirements and adopt the practices that are acceptable.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is not quite the question I asked. Obviously, these people are engaging in criminal activity. They are fringe people we do not want in a community. If there was a licensed structured assessment for recreational hunting and, I suppose, more eyes out there, would that in any way mitigate some of the problems that you are experiencing?

[11.20 am]

Mr Delane: I think it certainly could. I have been dealing with it myself for a very long time in various areas and there has certainly been plenty of evidence over many years for pig relocation and for illegal entry to conservation areas and the like and some pretty untoward behaviour by some hunters, also relocating of deer et cetera. My sense is that if, yes, there was a high-profile, well-organised and, if you like, relatively dense program in, for example, the Lake Muir area, the unsavoury pig hunting fraternity would go somewhere else. Would you shade them out? You would probably move them rather than remove, I suspect. But, no doubt, with an appropriate profile and participation, but including a significant presence of various regulatory officers, which would need to be funded by some means, I think you would shade it out. The evidence here and, I think, around Australia is that they would simply go somewhere else.

The CHAIRMAN: In your submission on page 2, you say —

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.

So you see that as being one of the problems and you say that that is unregulated movements. If there were regulated movements in a regulated environment, would you be able to control that problem, and how big a problem would it be?

Mr Delane: Probably dieback is the most obvious example, and I think everyone is aware of just how devastating that can be and how you can take that disease well into an otherwise almost pristine part of our fantastic native areas. There is evidence of weeds also being moved in a similar way. A regulated system with a reasonable code of practice operating would minimise that risk, so that would be helpful.

The CHAIRMAN: I confess that I have never been out shooting or hunting and I do not particularly go out bushwalking very much, but I know myself the issues surrounding dieback because it is education, and from a very early age, we all know what dieback is and we know not to go into a dieback area; and, if you do, wash your tyres and all those sorts of things. Are the public not already quite aware of those issues?

Mr Delane: My nearly 20 years as a regulator tells me that awareness and behaviour can be completely different things, and where you have got four-wheel drives involved and mud and boots and animals, in fact you can move diseases and weeds a long way and pretty regularly, and there are plenty of examples of really very cavalier behaviour by individuals involved. These guys are cowboys.

The CHAIRMAN: Cowboys with guns.

Mr Delane: Cowboys with guns. Not everyone is like that. Clearly, there are very responsible —

Hon RICK MAZZA: There are plenty of cowboys without guns.

Mr Delane: It is just one of those additional risks.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: In the Nannup group, I think Frank Camorra has done a pretty good job as far as the feral pigs go there. Is it a real threat that they are getting from a small section of the public against their wellbeing? We are getting a lot of pushback from people in Collie on the amount of feral pigs that are being caught in Lake Muir or somewhere down there being released up in Collie so that keeps their hunting fertile and they have got plenty of numbers to hunt. There seems to be a lot of comment coming back through our office of that happening where people are releasing animals into the bush so they have got their hunting stocks. Is that a real issue, or how are you combatting it?

Mr Read: The issue is really very difficult to quantify and very difficult to have any measure of it, but DNA measures have shown it is definitely happening. For the Nannup area, I am not so sure; for the Lake Muir area, it is certainly there; and for the Northampton area, it is certainly happening up there, and I understand it is happening increasingly there as an increasing number of pig hunters are looking for a greater opportunity. The outcome is that pig hunters will want to have pigs to hunt and those who are controlling it will want to have no pigs. It is a divergent argument there. It could be managed, but it is a difficult one.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Sorry, but that is a current problem, though, is it not? It is not a problem that will arise through this system. It is a current problem.

Mr Read: It is current, yes.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Could that not be monitored through road movements a bit, you know, whether working with the police in a—it is pretty easy to see a pig on the back of a ute?

Mr Read: I will not go too far back into history, but I know there have been road stops. There was one that involved our staff about 12 months ago in Collie, that started at four in the morning and did not intercept some. But it gives zero results; that has been the result. But it sends a message out. So it is not for those reasons.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: From my perspective, representing the Mining and Pastoral area, my biggest concern about a system of recreational hunting is the negative impact it could possibly have on the pastoral industry in particular, by the very fact that hunters want, I guess, a number of stock to be able to go out and recreate and hunt. The biggest impact and risk to the pastoral industry—or one of them—is the eradication of feral animals. So from my perspective I would be interested in your comment around how you would manage that from a positive perspective, because that in itself, if it is a massive risk to the pastoral industry, is difficult from a government perspective as to the impacts of how you would manage that.

Mr Delane: If I think about a pastoral property in the rangelands with a leaseholder that is supportive of this, and with a licensing arrangement which involves professionally managed groups as opposed to individuals, people who have had the appropriate induction and signed up to codes of practice et cetera, so all of the necessary standards should be adhered to, then it seems to me you could have significant constructive activity on a property such as that, including managing the occupational health and safety risks, et cetera, and in fact you might even generate what you might call a new tourist business in some of those areas. I mean, these people do spend money. So I would have thought that is manageable. The question is, can you manage it on a scale and can it be effectively regulated on a cost-recovery basis. Does the community think that it should subsidise hunters by having departments like mine meet a net cost of regulating it? I doubt that. So it would be cost recovered. It would not be an insignificant cost. But it could all be managed.

The CHAIRMAN: When you say “cost recovery”, I am just quickly looking at the CSIRO report. It seems that hunters in Australia are spending in excess of \$1 billion annually on hunting. So I think there could be more than cost recovery involved in any scheme that might be introduced in the future.

If there are no further questions from members, is there anything further that you might like to add?

Mr Read: If I can, just following up the last question that was provided by the director general, the opportunity in all the pastoral areas could be realised by recognised biosecurity groups, which are funded through, as you are probably aware, matched funding by government for the rates that they collect. So it is a good mechanism. They are characterised by having limited capacity. Their main aim is wild dogs, which has been referenced before, and shooting ad hoc through that would be difficult, but goats where they are not managed would be a good target. Can I just comment further on the large herbivore programs, which they do generally manage on a regional basis. There could be an opportunity through that. But that adds extra difficulty, as has been mentioned before. That requires particular planning and codes of practice application and independent audits, and there are other issues. So that is the opportunity through recognised biosecurity groups.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for appearing in front of us today. As our inquiry goes further down the road and we get to our deliberations, there may be other matters that we want to clarify with you, and which we may do either by writing to you or, if necessary, perhaps calling you back in for another hearing. So hopefully you will be amenable to that if you are approached by us to come back for another visit some time down the track.

Mr Delane: Of course we will be amenable, Chair.

The CHAIRMAN: You always are. Thank you very much.

Hearing concluded at 11.30 am
