

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

INQUIRY INTO THE POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONTRIBUTION OF RECREATIONAL HUNTING SYSTEMS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 13 AUGUST 2014**

SESSION FIVE

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 10.38 am**Mrs STEPHANIE BUCKLAND****Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Western Australia, sworn and examined:****Mr MYLES KANE BOARDMAN****Government Relations and Policy Manager, Tourism Western Australia, sworn and examined:****Mr JUSTIN VAUGHAN****Director, Executive and Strategic Services, Tourism Western Australia, sworn and examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Welcome to the committee. I will just take the time to introduce you to the members of this committee: Hon Rick Mazza, who is a member for Agricultural Region; Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson from East Metropolitan Region; the Deputy Chairman, Hon Darren West, also from the Agricultural Region; I am Liz Behjat from the North Metropolitan Region; Dr Julia Lawrinson, our advisory officer; Hon Nigel Hallett from the South West Region; and Hon Jacqui Boydell from Mining and Pastoral. So you can see we have got a good spread with most of the regions covered here. I think South Metropolitan is the only one missing.

On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for coming in today. As you know, we have to run through some formalities. We will do the swearing in first: would you like to take the oath or affirmation?

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

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

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard, and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any documents you refer to during the course of this hearing for the record. Please be aware of the microphones and try to speak into them; ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make noise near them, and try to speak in turn. 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 of evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

We do not have a formal submission from Tourism WA to the inquiry, but we do know that you have been looking at our submissions that are publicly available on the website. I think probably the process for today would be easier if, as the experts in tourism in this state, you might like to talk to us about what you would see as, given our terms of reference for the inquiry, the upside of an extension of a recreational hunting system and what perhaps might be the downside from the tourism point of view. Are you happy to proceed that way, Stephanie?

Mrs Buckland: Yes. Given that we have not made a submission, we have prepared a statement. It may take two to three minutes to read it out.

The CHAIRMAN: That would be lovely; do that.

Mrs Buckland: Okay.

The Western Australian Tourism Commission—Tourism WA—is an economic development agency, principally responsible for promoting Western Australia as an attractive holiday or business event destination to domestic and international consumers. In addition to promoting Western Australia, Tourism WA is also responsible for enabling the economic and regulatory conditions under which tourism businesses prosper. Tourism WA attracts and markets major events, supports significant tourism infrastructure and development projects, and provides policy advice to the government and Minister for Tourism on matters related to tourism or travel within Western Australia.

Tourism is worth \$8 billion to the Western Australian economy annually, employs more than 91 000 people and accounts for about seven per cent of all jobs in our state. The state government's Tourism 2020 strategy sets the goal of increasing the value of tourism to \$12 billion annually by 2020.

Growing tourism's economic and employment contribution to the Western Australian economy will require attracting more visitors to Western Australia, convincing them to stay longer, encouraging them to disperse into regional areas, and encouraging them to spend more money during their stay. In order to achieve this goal, target markets have been identified on the basis of existing visitor behaviour, trip expenditure and potential for market growth. Western Australians are a key target market. Frequent travellers living in Melbourne, Singapore, Sydney, China and the United Kingdom are also significant target markets. Western Australia's distance and high cost of travel for interstate and international markets makes promoting the state a challenge. The "Experience Extraordinary" brand positioning has been developed by Tourism WA to recognise that travel to Western Australia may be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for some of our visitors, and as such a strong proposition or a reason to travel is required. Various campaigns we have run under the Experience Extraordinary positioning highlight the unique attributes of Western Australia's natural landscapes and culture, and aim to compel the potential visitor to come and experience Western Australia for themselves.

Tourism WA has further categorised our domestic travel market into socioeconomic segments to enable us to better channel the promotion of our state to those travellers who are most interested in the experiences that we have on offer here. We call them the "aspirational achievers", the "dedicated discoverers" and the "grey explorers", and they are identified as our priority segments. For aspirational achievers travel is viewed as a reward, and they seek luxury experiences and boutique destinations. The dedicated discoverers are high-income travellers who seek new and different experiences, and the grey explorers are retired or semi-retired travellers who are seeking new experiences but also place a high value on travelling to make connections with their families and friends.

Consumer demand research undertaken by Tourism Australia provides some specific insights into what international visitors are seeking from an Australian holiday. The research found that across all of Australia's international markets a safe and secure destination ranks as the most important factor for choosing a holiday destination, and was named in the top five factors of destination choice by 61 per cent of respondents. Value for money, good food, wine, produce and cuisine, and world-class beauty and natural environments rounded out the top four responses. Twelve per cent of respondents named different and interesting local wildlife in their top five important factors in choosing a destination. We have a summary of that research to provide to the committee members if they are interested; the full research report can be downloaded from the Tourism Australia website.

Tourism WA has responded to consumer demand by marketing Western Australia as a destination that provides a diverse range of nature-based experiences for all travellers. In 2009, Tourism WA participated in the Department of Environment and Conservation-led review of nature-based tourism, and we have also got copies of that to provide to the committee. The review recommended approaches to ensure that both tourism and conservation objectives are achieved in the management of national parks and other protected areas, development of infrastructure and the granting of commercial operations on these lands. Approaches included long-term tourism operator leases and licences for national parks, as well as the Naturebank program to reserve investor-ready land for accommodation development within national parks. Changes to commercial licence arrangements now mean that tourism businesses applying for a licence to operate within a national park or a protected area must obtain both a licence from the Department of Parks and Wildlife, and must be quality standard accredited by the Tourism Council of Western Australia. There are more than 300 licensed and accredited commercial tourism operations in Western Australia's national parks; some have secured long-term leases for nature-based tourism activities. Tourism WA suggests that the standing committee may wish to consult with the Tourism Council of Western Australia, as well as ourselves, about the potential changes to the recreational hunting regulations that may have an impact on those accreditation programs or the members.

As the brand manager of Experience Extraordinary, Tourism WA is committed to ensure that the experience visitors have while travelling around our state matches to the brand promise. The accessibility of extraordinary nature-based experiences to the majority of visitors is of particular importance to Tourism WA, and obviously underlies our desire to provide input to this inquiry.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for that; that is a really good overview of what you do. So for nature-based tourism, if there was an extension of recreational hunting into the areas that we are looking at, would that impact negatively or positively on nature-based tourism?

[10.50 am]

Mrs Buckland: I believe it would have to be managed carefully because it could potentially impact negatively on people's ability to access the national parks, and the ability of the tourism operations that already exist in the national parks.

The CHAIRMAN: We have information that is out in the public domain in relation to the economic benefit of hunting in other states; \$431 million is what we have been told is the benefit per annum to Victoria. Would you also see that there could be similar economic benefit in Western Australia?

Mrs Buckland: We have not done a similar study. We have had a look at the Victorian study, and we have done some very rough projections on the potential visitor expenditure on the basis of what we know other intrastate visitors spend when they are travelling around the state for other purposes—holiday and leisure. I might just ask Kane Boardman to explain some of the calculations he has made.

Mr Boardman: We undertook two different estimates. Firstly, as Stephanie mentioned, we took the intrastate average spend, recognising that most recreational hunters will be intrastate visitors spending time hunting in Western Australia, but then we looked at Victoria and at the proportion of firearm owners who are recreational hunters. We extrapolated that to Western Australia, where we have some, I think it is 82 000 civilian gun licence owners, and that gave us a figure of approximately 60 000 people who hunt to some extent on an annual basis. From this we have assumed that the average hunter would spend six days per year hunting, and that is from the Victorian study; that is the figure given for the average deer hunter. From that, we get 355 000 days per year spent hunting within the state, and that is assuming that we have a similar regime to Victoria, so this is after the changes. We have to bear in mind that there are currently a number of days that hunters are spending on private land and in controlled hunts on public land in the state. We also need to bear in mind that there are 16 million recreational days, or multiday visits, to public

land by all users, which obviously recreational hunters would be a subset of in the future. We then took a more generous estimate, whereby we gave two examples of potential spending: one was based on the spend of \$124 per day, which is the average spend of an intrastate visitor, and by that we measured an economic spend—not benefit but spend—of \$44 million per annum by recreational hunters. We then took the figure given for Victorian deer hunters, which is roughly \$5 000 or \$5 367 per year per hunter, so not per trip. According to that estimate, which includes helicopter hunting and a range of other quite expensive outgoings on a trip, that generated \$320 million worth of on-trip expenditure by hunters. That sounds like a very large figure, but compared with the \$8 billion spent by nature-based tourists in that very generous scenario it would account for four per cent of nature-based tourist spending, and that is not to account for the fact that other users of our national parks and other protected lands may be displaced during hunting events, so their spending may go down.

Mr Vaughan: So I guess the point is also that we have not undertaken our own study. What we have done is some rough estimates of what —

The CHAIRMAN: We understand that —

Mr Vaughan: And any good study into this type of reform or change would also look at the costs and the benefits. There would obviously need to be some management regime that would be implemented, and that would have an associated cost and we do not know what those costs would be. As Kane mentioned as well, there are issues around activity substitution; so some of those visitors who would otherwise be travelling in the national parks doing other things such as camping bushwalking et cetera may just be changing the activities they are doing, so we are just substituting one activity for another activity. The other aspect to it, which we have alluded to as well which is another, I guess, risk, is the loss of other visitors who would ordinarily be using that public land; that is, nature-based tourists or other tourists who come into our national parks wanting to experience extraordinary, like we say through our marketing campaigns, and then not being able to do that, so therefore not coming to Western Australia, potentially, at all.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Did I hear you correctly, Kane, that the tourism expenditure in WA is worth \$4 billion?

Mrs Buckland: \$8 billion.

Mr Boardman: \$8 billion.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Have you looked at other states like Victoria and New South Wales to see how the recreational hunting systems there dovetail into their tourism industry?

Mr Boardman: Not extensively.

The CHAIRMAN: You would not have expected them to do that until such time as the government would direct them to do that.

Hon RICK MAZZA: No, but some of this rough information that Kane has, he has obviously had a bit of a look at Victoria. Obviously, they are facilitating both hunters and the tourism industry in that state, and I just wondered what correlations we could get between the two.

The other thing is, was there any estimate of a hunter coming with their family, and maybe their family staying in the city while they are on a hunting trip for a few days; and what expenditure they may actually inject into the economy as well if three or four family members are also visiting the state?

Mrs Buckland: We have not looked at that, but one of the things we have had a look at is the types of game that travelling hunters want to travel to hunt. You may know this better than we do, but certainly the research tells us that the propensity to travel to hunt is primarily driven by the types of animals. Those would be, I guess, characterised colloquially as big game, such as deer—certainly some of the types of animals that hunters are able to hunt in Canada, the United States and Africa.

Again, we had a look at what might be available to hunt in Western Australia, and it is our view, based on the research that would suggest what people travel to hunt, that there would probably be a very limited number of people who would travel to Western Australia expressly for the purpose of hunting. We think Western Australians would travel around the state and are likely to do that for the purpose of hunting, but I think it is unlikely that interstate and international visitors would travel to Western Australia for the purpose of hunting and bring their families along.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Is that a research thing or just an assumption at this point?

Mrs Buckland: It is based on the research that shows what species of animals people are likely to travel to hunt.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Just going back to the tourism dovetailing into hunting systems in other states, the reason I ask is because you talked about nature-based tourism, which is obviously an important part of our tourism. I would not expect in those other states that popular tourism nature-based venues would be areas where people would hunt in any case.

Mrs Buckland: I am sorry; can you repeat the question?

Hon RICK MAZZA: What I am saying to you is that popular destinations—like the Pinnacles, for argument's sake, which is a popular destination from tourists from around Australia and internationally—would not be an area, I think, that would be declared as a hunting area. I am suggesting that in other states maybe they are drawing a delineation around an area to say there is no conflict between hunting activities and nature-based tourism.

Mrs Buckland: I think I said probably right at the outset after the statement that it is our view that if the regulations were to change, there would have to be a very careful management regime put in place so as to make sure that the places where people wished to visit to undertake other types of activities are not places where hunters are hunting at the same time. Noting that there may be—you know, there may be hunting seasons that are designated for particular times of the year and particular places, and obviously particular species that might be identified.

[11.00 am]

Hon RICK MAZZA: Sure.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I just wanted to go back to your first response that you had to the question about how you thought you could manage tourism from a nature perspective along with other tourists accessing public lands just for, say, camping purposes or bush walking. We have heard evidence earlier today, particularly about the hunting of deer where it is in small pockets, so in the south west of the state. Could you give your opinion on how you think you could manage that on a seasonal basis mixing that with the other tourism aspects of people wanting to visit that area? We already have seasons for other areas, like abalone season or say, in Exmouth or Carnarvon for people who do not want to go massive game fishing but still fish there at other times of the year, while they understand that during that week they might not want to go there, and to me, that is manageable. It is purely an education thing, so we manage other seasons as it is. Can you just make some comments around how you think from a tourism perspective Tourism WA could positively promote where there are small pockets of, say, that game species and manage it with other tourism?

Mrs Buckland: I would not view it as Tourism WA's responsibility to manage the —

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I am just seeking your opinion.

Mrs Buckland: Yes.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Because you said it was difficult. You would see it as being difficult to manage.

Mrs Buckland: No, no, I did not say that. I said it would be important to have a proper management structure in place in order to manage it. I do not think it would be Tourism WA's

responsibility to establish that structure. Certainly, it would not be Tourism WA's responsibility to oversee it; obviously that is for the government to decide. But there would have to be—in my view, there would have to be very clear communication structures set up so that the people who are hunting know when and where they are allowed to undertake that activity, and the people who are wishing to undertake other activities are aware that hunting is going on in a specific area and a specific period of time. So that, unlike fishing, you know, it is unlikely that somebody who encroaches on a fishing territory is going to get harmed if fishing is occurring during a season; whereas, with hunting, there is potential for an accident if a bushwalker happens to be mistaken for a goat.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I think people get killed on boats as well.

Mrs Buckland: But not by fishermen, generally. So I guess what I am saying is I think there would have to be a careful communication management process in place to make sure that the people who are not meant to be in an area when hunting is occurring are not in that area so that they are not at risk of being harmed.

Mr Vaughan: In relation to the messaging around and communication of safety issues or risks to potential visitors, Tourism WA has the westernaustralia.com website, and there is a section of that website which talks about visitor safety. But we are not the experts in particular areas or locations around WA where they have those particular safety risks in place. So we will rely on third parties to provide that advice to us, and often we would then refer them—refer the visitors to seek further information about that particular activity or risk. So —

Mrs Buckland: So, for example, there might be a section about hunting on the website that says: refer to the Department of Parks and Wildlife website for the most up-to-date information about what, where, when. But obviously that relies on the visitor going to the westernaustralia.com website and seeking information out.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: That happens now with cyclone seasons and flooding in the north, and so that would be a normal practice, I would suggest.

Mr Vaughan: Yes, I think that the other thing though is around the messaging of such a reform and how that will be communicated to the public and the potential negative media coverage that might occur around the world in relation to such a change. And I am not aware of what occurred in Victoria, but that may impact on our reputation as a nature-based tourism destination, and so that is a risk that we would be worried about as well.

Mrs Buckland: And obviously one that would have to be managed.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: I think that wraps it up for today. So thank you for that. It has given us a good overview—as well as the information that you provided in your statement. I know it is very difficult when you are not being directed by a minister to go and find out these things, so it really is just a bit of a hunting expedition for us really, to find out what we can about what is going on in your system. So thank you very much for taking the time.

The Witnesses: Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, that concludes our public hearing for today. Members of the gallery, thank you very much for coming along. To those who gave evidence, we appreciate that. The committee will now go into closed session, so if we could ask you to leave the room that would be terrific. Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 11.05 am
