



### **Submission to Inquiry into the potential environmental contribution of recreational hunting systems**

It is beyond doubt that there exist significant populations of introduced feral animals in most areas of WA on both public and private land. The species include foxes, feral cats, wild dogs, goats, pigs, camels and donkeys. There is also much evidence that these species do significant damage to the native flora and fauna, in some cases causing some native animals to become endangered and possible extinct. Control of these feral populations at present is somewhat ad hoc and only effective over limited areas.

Private land owners are free to make their own arrangements regarding control of these pests. However on public land the populations are largely allowed to expand, limited only by supplies of water, and food which they source from native wildlife and plants. There is anecdotal evidence that some illegal hunting does occur on public land.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that there are a significant number of licensed firearms owners in WA who would welcome the opportunity to assist in the control of these feral species by undertaking their chosen sport of hunting on both private and public land. The Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (SSAA) is already facilitating this on private land through its "Farmers Assist" program. Other states in Australia (and New Zealand) already have systems in place to allow recreational hunting on public land.

So, it seems clear that there is a great opportunity for recreational hunting of feral species to provide a positive environmental benefit on public land in WA at low or no public cost.

There are also other benefits such as giving recreational hunters wider opportunities to pursue their sport which encourages the development of many positive health outcomes and life skills. There would also be tourism options to explore.

The terms of reference of this inquiry already acknowledge the potential benefits of allowing recreational hunting on public land. The question then is to compare these benefits with any potential negative outcomes.

The possible negative outcomes can probably be grouped under two headings. These are

- Loss of amenity for non-hunters
- Safety



### Loss of Amenity

With a well designed system, loss of amenity should not be a problem. For example a New Zealand Dept of Conservation brochure for one of their national parks states:

*The park caters for a wide range of recreational activities including tramping (bush walking), fishing, skiing (two ski areas in the park), ski touring, mountaineering, hunting, and mountain biking.*

This advice is common across many of New Zealand's national parks and indicates that shared use, including hunting, of public land is quite possible.

Other states in Australia also allow hunting on public land so there are several models which could be used as guides.

WA has an advantage that much public land where feral animals thrive is in remote areas. This could make it easier to further reduce any loss of amenity for non-hunters as they are less likely to visit such areas.

### Safety

Safety is a serious issue which should not be taken lightly. However a well designed system would reduce risks to an acceptable level. Again other governments already have systems in place which provide evidence of this.

I suggest any system should include the following:

- recreational hunters should be separately licensed and have to undergo, and be assessed in, a significant training course. The course would include all aspects, practical and theoretical, of firearms use and safety as well as basic first aid. The Recreational Skippers Ticket might make a good model on which to base the delivery of this training. I believe most hunters would welcome being offered this type of training.
- hunters should need to "log on" to hunt a particular area during a particular time period. The system should allow hunters to know of any other concurrent hunting activities in that area. The number of hunters operating in a particular area could also be controlled by the system.

GPS technology should be used to ensure hunters stay within designated hunting areas. Post hunt reports could also be facilitated. This should all be achieved on-line thus minimising administrative costs and providing a database of hunting activities.

- each hunting party should include at least one member over the age of 25
- hunters should be members of a nationally recognised association such as the SSAA and carry suitable personal liability insurance.

Anyone found contravening these regulations should be subject to serious penalties such as fines, confiscation of equipment including vehicles and cancellation of firearms licenses.

I believe that if an appropriate system is put in place then recreational hunting on public land would provide many community benefits which far outweigh any negative impact which might result.

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