

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

INQUIRY INTO THE POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONTRIBUTION OF RECREATIONAL HUNTING SYSTEMS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 20 AUGUST 2014**

SESSION TWO

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 9.33 am**Mrs LYNNE BRADSHAW****President, RSPCA WA, sworn and examined:****Mr DAVID VAN OORAN****Chief Executive Officer, RSPCA WA, sworn and examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Hi, my name is Liz Behjat. I am the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Administration. I represent the North Metropolitan Region. You may not be familiar with all the members of our committee, so I will introduce them to you. Starting from my left, we have Hon Rick Mazza, who represents the Agricultural Region; Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson from the East Metropolitan Region; the deputy chair of the committee, Hon Darren West, from the Agricultural Region; Dr Julia Lawrinson, our advisory officer; and Hon Nigel Hallett from the South West Region. Not with us today is our colleague, Hon Jacqui Boydell, from the Mining and Pastoral Region. Now you know who we are, what I would like you to do is to take an oath or affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

The CHAIRMAN: You will have both 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 be aware of the microphones and try to speak into them and ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make noise near them. 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.

Firstly, is there an opening statement that you want to make in support of the submission you have made to the inquiry?

Mrs Bradshaw: Yes, there is; I would like to deliver the opening statement.

The CHAIRMAN: Please do.

Mrs Bradshaw: The RSPCA speaks for the community, and the community will be asked at some point whether this is what they really want—to kill animals for enjoyment under the guise of pest control. Not only, in our opinion, has this proven to be ineffective, it will scare the public out of national parks and public land. Having said that, we do support the control of invasive species under a firm management plan—something we are not particularly good at in Western Australia. Just for the record, RSPCA works under a set of policies nationally that have to have unanimous support from everyone around the country. All states and territories now have a policy on hunting of animals for sport. RSPCA Australia is opposed to the hunting of any animal for sport, as it causes

unnecessary injury, suffering, distress or death to the prey animal. There is a little bit more to that than that I will not go into. That also applies to the hunting of wild animals.

In summary, our opening statement is that the RSPCA is strongly opposed to the introduction of recreational hunting on public lands in Western Australia. We argue that any potential positive outcomes from recreational hunting are outweighed by the many significant negative impacts. They include unnecessary and often considerable animal suffering, ineffective pest animal management, and safety concerns for other public land users.

The RSPCA is not opposed to the shooting of animals; this can be a humane method of killing animals when done by experienced, skilled and responsible shooters, and when those shooters adhere to accepted standard operating procedures. However, hunters are not always experienced, skilled and responsible. Certainly they are under no obligation to follow best practice, which means they might not use the correct firearm or ammunition. They might not use the correct shot placement or they might chase animals for long periods, prior to killing them. They might not locate wounded animals and kill them quickly and humanely, and they might abandon dependent young to fend for themselves after their mother has been shot. Although some hunters may have the skills, knowledge and motivation to minimise the suffering of their prey, many do not, and it is inevitable that many animals will endure pain and distress. But hunting is more than just shooting: bows, arrows and also knives are used to kill animals, resulting in a more painful and prolonged death compared with a well-placed rifle shot to the head. Also, dogs are sometimes used, for example to chase, bail up and hold feral pigs, which causes high levels of unnecessary fear and distress prior to death. So hunting is not humane, nor is it an effective form of pest animal management. The aim of planned and coordinated pest animal management programs is to reduce the negative impacts on agricultural production and natural resource systems using the most humane, effective, target-specific and economical techniques available.

[9.40 am]

In contrast, hunting is done on an ad hoc basis, with the primary motivation being the desire to kill pest or game animals for recreation; that is, for pleasure. There is no defined objective, and no planning, monitoring or assessment of effectiveness. The methods used by hunters are labour intensive, expensive and not effective in reducing populations of pest animals over large areas for the long term. For a third example, compare recreational hunting of feral pigs with government-run pest animal management control programs. The New South Wales Game Council reported that 11 000-odd pigs were removed through hunting activities from declared state forests across New South Wales in the six years from 2006 to 2012. In contrast, in 2012, in one region of New South Wales, the local livestock and catchment management authorities worked together to kill almost 10 000 feral pigs as part of three large-scale integrated programs conducted over several weeks and covering a very large area of about 1.6 million hectares. So, that means in comparison that recreational hunting removed roughly the same amount of feral pigs over a six-year period that were removed by a coordinated and planned feral pig management program conducted over a matter of weeks. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is where the RSPCA is coming from—coordinated pest management programs.

In addition, in Tasmania, an investigation into the effectiveness of ground-shooting methods for wallabies found that in two nights of shooting, a single professional marksman achieved the same level of population reduction as four recreational shooters were able to achieve in a year. Furthermore, when shooting has been carried out to reduce animal numbers as part of a coordinated pest animal management program, professional marksmen shooting from a helicopter have been shown to be much more effective than recreational hunters shooting from the ground. For example, in the Gum Lagoon reserve park in South Australia, 65 recreational hunters over a period of four days killed only 44 deer, while just one professional marksman in a helicopter was able to kill 182 deer in four hours. In further support of government-conducted shooting operations, an

assessment by a panel of animal welfare experts has demonstrated that aerial shooting is the most humane technique for shooting large numbers of pest animals, since the distance from the shooter to the animal is much shorter, and any wounded animals can be followed up quickly.

Not only are recreational hunters ineffective at pest–animal management, they have interfered with the effective control of pest animals in some areas, especially in state forests. Evidence from genetic studies has shown that pig hunters have illegally transported feral pigs into new areas so that they have animals to hunt. The national threat abatement plan for feral pigs states that continued release of feral pigs for hunting, either in new areas or in areas they do not currently occupy, is a major threat to the effective management of feral pigs and their damage. Deer, especially fallow, red and chital deer, have also been deliberately and illegally released into deer-free areas so that hunters do not have to travel too far for their sport. It has also been shown that shooting feral pigs, especially where dogs are used, can be counterproductive to other control methods such as trapping and baiting, because it can disperse pigs or make them more wary of humans. But hunters do not want to reduce pest numbers. Why would they? They want to ensure they have animals to shoot into the future. Whereas coordinated pest animal management programs target all animals, including females and young, hunters will often target large trophy males and leave behind females, and even young, to maintain a sustainable harvest for the future.

In addition to being inhumane and ineffective, the RSPCA argues that recreational hunting will reduce public enjoyment of national parks and other recreational areas. Based on figures from Outdoor WA, state forest and recreational areas are visited by over seven million people each year. But opening up these public lands for a small number of recreational hunters will restrict many other people from learning about and enjoying outdoor pursuits and put the safety of those accessing these areas at risk. So, surely any potential economic, cultural or recreational benefits to a small number of individuals from recreational hunting are insignificant in comparison to the cost to the wider community.

The RSPCA can therefore see no real benefits from the introduction of recreational hunting. Whilst we recognise that there is a need to ensure that the impacts of pest animals are minimised, opening up public lands to recreational hunters will cause unnecessary suffering to many animals. It will impair the effectiveness of coordinated and planned pest management programs and jeopardise the safety and enjoyment of these places for the community. The RSPCA has extensive experience of developing policy guidelines for humane pest control. We have the understanding and the expertise to do this, and we employ qualified and trained people who can advise and participate with a range of organisations and government bodies to develop strategies for control, containment or culling. We can give you recent examples in Western Australia—the Lake Gregory horse issue was one such case. We are currently talking with the PGA about a plan for wild dogs. Also, nationally on the camel management plan, the RSPCA contributed quite heavily.

So, in summary, ladies and gentlemen, control of invasive species should be done under organised and strategic management plans, and we need to improve in Western Australia to achieve this.

[Interruption from the gallery.]

The CHAIRMAN: I just remind people in the gallery that you are not to participate in the proceedings.

In your statement, you said that hunting at the moment, as you are aware, does take place on private land and it is done on an ad hoc basis. Do you see that if perhaps there was a more regulated system introduced involving hunters being trained regarding animal welfare issues, that that could improve animal welfare outcomes in general?

Mrs Bradshaw: No, I do not. I think that the whole subject of hunting for pleasure is something that the public in the majority does not understand and will not accept. I think that apart from the responsible hunters, of which I am sure there are many, often they are let down by what I call the

feral component of people who do not want to conform to anything; and certainly to understand the animal welfare component of hunting for sport, I am sure that that is an impossible task.

The CHAIRMAN: Who do you describe as the “feral component”?

Mrs Bradshaw: I think, as I mentioned in the opening statement, that there is a component of society that likes to kill for pleasure and will seed animals into certain areas to have enough animals to go for.

The CHAIRMAN: And you think that is what currently happens in other jurisdictions where there are recreational hunting systems in place?

Mrs Bradshaw: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have evidence to back that up?

Mrs Bradshaw: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: What about statistics on the wounding rates of animals by recreational hunters in other jurisdictions? Do you have any evidence of that?

Mrs Bradshaw: Statistics, well, I am sure we can provide something.

Mr Van Ooran: We will take that on notice and come back to you.

The CHAIRMAN: If you can provide that and you do have some statistics, that would help us in our deliberations.

Mr Van Ooran: Was that in relation to recreational hunters specifically?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

[Supplementary Information No A1.]

The CHAIRMAN: Members, are there any questions for our witnesses?

Hon RICK MAZZA: You mentioned that you accept that skilled marksmen do humanely despatch pest animals. Do you accept the fact that many recreational hunters actually take ethics and animal welfare very seriously and are in fact themselves quite skilled marksmen; and, also, the feral element that you refer to—I do not know what evidence we have got of that, but if that does exist, would a regulated system actually reduce the number of people who are doing the wrong thing?

Mrs Bradshaw: The RSPCA is against the hunting of animals for sport. But if you transfer the analogy I mentioned in my opening statement about a clean shot to the head, then I am sure that recreational hunters have expert marksmen who could be channelled into the system under the approved management plans, rather than opening up public lands for sport as such. So, there is a very distinct definition.

Hon RICK MAZZA: All right. When you talk about the idea of hunting for pleasure, that is more the emotive side of things, rather than, I suppose, the actual fact of humane despatching of an animal. The hunting for pleasure side of the thing is what you object to. So it is more the emotive side of things.

Mrs Bradshaw: It is hunting for sport. It is not emotive. It is actually a fact that the RSPCA policy is against any kind of hunting for sport. In other words, if there is a necessity to cull animals for a specific purpose because there is a species that is out of control and affecting the environment, or whatever, then under an approved management plan, with expert marksmen and in a certain way, we do not object to that.

[9.50 am]

Mr Van Ooran: If I may add to that, we believe there are examples where feral animal management is needed and we have been actively involved in that, as we said before. For us it comes down to an integrated pest management program that is multi-faceted, that actually delivers

measurable results in reducing numbers. In the best case scenario, a hunted animal would be shot by an experienced, skilled and responsible shooter. It would be clearly seen within range. The correct firearm, ammunition and shot placement would be used. The animal would not be chased excessively. If it was wounded, it would be located et cetera and so on and so forth. So, for us it is about strict control of management and integration with government monitoring and management.

Hon RICK MAZZA: If that is on a professional basis where the shooter is paid or on a recreational basis, if those controls were in place. For example, as I understand it, in New South Wales before you can get a licence, you have to be a member of a club. That club has certain ethics on shot placement and animal welfare and other issues, which the recreational hunter has to abide by, and they have to then provide a report of the animals they have taken for the government. So, is it one of those things where, if a recreational hunting system had those same safety things in place, that is something you would accept?

Mrs Bradshaw: No; I think it is the whole term “recreational hunting”, that is hunting for sport. What we are trying to make that differentiation is that those skills can be applied to a feral pest integrated management program, but we would not support recreational hunting.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So it is more the hunting for sport than the actual skilled marksmanship of animal welfare, of cleanly taking an animal?

The CHAIRMAN: Rick, I think that Ms Bradshaw has made her position quite clear on that, and I really need to move to Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson.

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: You mentioned some examples of coordinated approaches with government agencies, I assume. In some of the evidence that DPaW gave, they talked about programs that they run where they engage local hunting clubs and groups to actually have a coordinated week or weekend of pest control eradicating particular species out of an area that is closed down to the public, and it is very clear that that is what is happening. Is that the kind of program that you say you would support, or do you claim that you absolutely want them to be professional marksmen.

Mr Van Ooran: Absolutely the highest qualified, experienced, skilled and responsible shooters, but most importantly are the results. So, has there been demonstrated success from those programs that were mentioned before; because that for us is the ultimate test in that we need to have a sustainable manageable program in place? For a program to be supported, it needs to have an ongoing extensive management plan beyond to ensure that we do not register the problem next month or next year or the following year. So, we are not clear, we have not seen the evidence —

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: From the department’s point of view, they have been successful and it sort of augments their ability to do it, but I am interest in your view. I think one of the issues that some of the hunting groups mentioned was that it depends on the calm manager in the place and it is patchy as to whether it goes ahead or not; sometimes it is cancelled at the last minute. Would those sorts of coordinated programs be a move in the right direction in terms of ensuring the animal welfare provisions and actually having an impact on the pest population in that area?

Mrs Bradshaw: It seems to me that that sort of thing, if it was part of a proper management plan there is a possibility, but it seems again to be giving people an outlet, if you like, to express that hunting instinct that they have, rather than probably what the community is wanting, which is, “Let us get our invasive species under control because it is affecting our environments.” So, I just think that it is a very grey line.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Lynne, you said the population does not understand or accept hunting. I think we are all well aware that hunting happens in many countries around the world. I think in my opinion have you a golden opportunity where you could use the education unit that is with RSPCA to be far broader in your approach to the issue. My comment is that I think you are very narrow.

You are saying “the general public”; have you got anything to back that up, because a lot of the people we know enjoy hunting?

Mrs Bradshaw: There is a percentage of the population in any community that hunts, but the majority of people do not.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: How can you say that?

Mrs Bradshaw: Hopefully, we can produce some stats, but in general I think if you looked at the population and you asked people, “Do you go out hunting?” most of them would say not.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: In Victoria it is been, what, a \$400-odd million —

Mrs Bradshaw: May be. It is an industry.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Yes.

Mrs Bradshaw: I think, though, that there is a lot of, shall we say, probably change process going on about the whole hunting side. So, as we said before, the RSPCA is not opposed to shooting animals or killing animals as such; it is the way in which it is done, and as a policy we do not support recreational hunting.

Mr Van Ooran: I will just add a little bit more to that. I think we might need to come back with some more information on this particular point because it is an important point, but the general public do not like amateur shooters and would prefer wildlife management to be done by professionals. There is a recent survey here that I have got some information on that might not have as much information as we need, but a recent survey of 1 000 Australians revealed the following in regard to the shooting of kangaroos.

The CHAIRMAN: I am sorry, can you identify the document, David, that you have got there?

Mr Van Ooran: This is just some internal notes that we put together.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay, and who conducted the survey?

Mr Van Ooran: I have got a URL here: rirdc.infoservices. I can provide this information to the committee, if you like. Shall I go on to say what it says?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, you can, but we will need to have that document verified; that is all.

Mr Van Ooran: Shooting by professional marksmen was thought to be more acceptable, 22 per cent versus nine per cent, more humane, 21 per cent by five per cent, more effective and safer and various percentages, and less likely to contribute to extinction. Then shooting by non-professional marksmen. It only goes some ways to the point the honourable member made but I can provide that later on.

[Supplementary Information No A2.]

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: While we are on that, I was interested in whether the RSPCA could provide more information about the examples they cited in their opening statement about the programs in Tasmania, South Australia, deer programs and the coordinated New South Wales programs.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you take that on notice as well and provide us with more detail in that regard?

[Supplementary Information No A3.]

Mr Van Ooran: That will be more on top of the original submission?

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: If they were not in the original submission.

Mr Van Ooran: Right, but they were in the original submission.

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: Okay.

The CHAIRMAN: We note from your original submission to us that a lot of the information that is in here is not referenced. So, perhaps if you could go through your submission to us and provide the references, because we do have to have that information so that we can take that on board when we are conducting our deliberations at a later date.

Mr Van Ooran: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, I think noting the time that we are going to have to pull this —

Hon RICK MAZZA: Chair, I have one more question. Should I ask it?

The CHAIRMAN: One more question, Hon Rick Mazza; one brief question.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I just wonder: what is the RSPCA's position on the use of poisons for animal control?

Mr Van Ooran: It certainly depends on the type of species that you are talking about as well. At the moment we are actively involved with the wild dog action plan nationally and we are looking at localising some initiatives here. I know it is an issue dear to your heart. We know there are new products on the market that have not been commercialised as yet in terms of poisoning. I do not have the full information here but we believe there are options that are better than the traditional 1080 in terms of wild dogs, for example, but it is quite a big open question, is it not?

The CHAIRMAN: And that is not really relevant to the whole recreational hunting question,

Hon RICK MAZZA: It is about animals.

The CHAIRMAN: I think you can correspond directly with the organisation if you wanted to find out things anything about poisoning, Hon Rick Mazza.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you Lynne and thank you David for taking the time to give us your submission and also to come and appear in front of us today. We certainly do appreciate the cooperation that we have been receiving from numerous organisations on both sides of this very topical issue, so thank you very much indeed.

Mr Van Ooran: Thank you for the opportunity.

Mrs Bradshaw: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 9.59 am
