

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 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 10.01 am**Mr JEFF STUART****WA President, Australian Deer Association, sworn and examined:****Mr MARK MAZZA****WA Vice President, Australian Deer Association, sworn and examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Good morning, gentlemen. You have been in the room earlier, in our public gallery, so you know who we are here on the committee. I ask you to now please take the oath or the affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath.]

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 talk 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.

Just before we get going, I probably should, just for the record, ask whether there is relationship between —

Mr Mazza: Yes.

Hon RICK MAZZA: He is my brother.

The CHAIRMAN: He is your brother?

Hon RICK MAZZA: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Just for the record, Mr Mazza the witness is the brother of Hon Rick Mazza, a member of the committee. We should know that for the record.

Hon DARREN WEST: Might get a bit of dirt on him!

Mr Mazza: Tonnes of it!

The CHAIRMAN: Any information you can give! We can go into closed hearings, if you would like!

Hon DARREN WEST: I think we do!

The CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, you have both heard the line of questioning we have been going through today, and we will follow similar lines with the Australian Deer Association. I notice here that Australia-wide you have 5 000 members; what about in Western Australia?

Mr Stuart: Currently we are sitting at just about 90 at present, but most of the members of ours are members of every other organisation.

The CHAIRMAN: But you ascribe to the Field and Game Association's position that it is "quality, not quantity"?

Mr Mazza: Absolutely.

Mr Stuart: I did have a laugh when that was mentioned, yes.

Hon DARREN WEST: I was just wondering who gets everybody else; they are clearly not in the Deer Association or the Field and Game Association.

The CHAIRMAN: I think they are in the Sporting Shooters Association.

Hon DARREN WEST: They must be in the Sporting Shooters Association.

The CHAIRMAN: I think they are.

Mr Mazza: The Australian Deer Association has a history of over 40 years. In WA I believe it is only about five to seven years that we have been established. Feral deer are a relatively new species to WA. There have never been significant numbers up until probably about 10 years ago when people started to notice that there were feral deer numbers building to a point where there are certain areas that have recognised problems now.

The CHAIRMAN: What caused the feral deer?

Mr Mazza: The failure of deer farms, basically. A lot of deer farmers, when they went broke they had no way of actually getting rid of them; some of them may have let them go. Also, you know, fences get damaged by falling trees during a storm or whatever, and there would be certain numbers that would get loose into state forests, where they would breed up and then, again, come to improved pastures to feed. That is where the issue lies especially with the hunting of deer; they do tend to hole up in state forests and then come out during the evening to feed on the improved pasture.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there any idea of the sorts of numbers of feral deer we are talking about?

Mr Mazza: There have not been any studies done at this stage.

Mr Stuart: No studies on anything.

Mr Mazza: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there a guesstimate or a rough idea? Are we talking about thousands of them?

Mr Mazza: Yes, there are pockets of thousands, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Mostly located in the south west region?

Mr Mazza: From as far north as Geraldton to as far south as Esperance.

The CHAIRMAN: Geraldton?

Mr Stuart: Esperance; right through, yes. People are very secretive; there are not a lot of animals to shoot, so they do not talk too much of where they are.

The CHAIRMAN: There are not a lot of them? But you said there were thousands.

Mr Stuart: Well, not a lot of people talking about them. They do not call a few thousand in pockets a lot of animals.

The CHAIRMAN: You are being very cagey!

Mr Stuart: That is what the deer scene is like; it is cagey purely because of that.

Mr Mazza: In comparison with Victoria, how many thousands in Victoria?

Mr Stuart: They cannot guess how many in Victoria.

Mr Mazza: Hundreds of thousands?

Mr Stuart: They need to shoot 100 000 every year in Victoria to keep it controlled.

The CHAIRMAN: The level of training that we have been asking about that we think is appropriate for recreational hunters regarding firearm safety, animal welfare and precautions regarding prevention of disease spread —

Mr Stuart: We actually run a training course that goes for two and a half days; it is currently on this weekend. We run it here in Western Australia. I did the very first one in Victoria 28 years ago; it has been running for nearly 30 years now. Through that it teaches everything from animal welfare, handling of meat to cooking it, firearms safety, respect for animals and law; it covers every aspect you can ever think of that would have something to do with hunting. They are taught that from the start.

The CHAIRMAN: Is feral deer meat the same as farmed deer meat?

Mr Mazza: Far superior.

Mr Stuart: No; it tastes better.

Mr Mazza: Far superior.

The CHAIRMAN: Because you have shot it yourself?

Mr Mazza: No, it is what they are able to eat. A deer is a browser as opposed to a grazer; in the wild they are able to browse on different foliage and it enhances the flavour of the meat. It is far superior.

Mr Stuart: It is like selling your chook eggs; apparently caged ones are not as good as free range.

Mr Mazza: They are free range and organic.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is another argument.

Mr Stuart: Yes; one we have all had many times!

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: As the Australian Deer Association, obviously you would like to see feral deer included in the management of the species. I guess this committee is looking at the economic benefits not just to communities, but the actual management of them. So without any studies of how many there are and exactly what kind of, sort of, economic damage they are doing to land, what is the benefit and how do we measure that at this point?

[10.10 am]

Mr Stuart: The biggest part with it is that it is from talking with local farmers. Depending on what they are growing in their paddocks, if they are growing feed the deer come in of an evening; deer only feed of a night, so unless they go and look then, they will only see it in the morning. They are not causing a huge problem to them at the moment while their numbers are not big, but in Victoria now they have just changed it that if deer come onto private land they are actually allowed to spotlight them now because the numbers have improved. That is where we are heading. You see it now with what the pigs are doing. Just because we are a deer association, that is a specialised thing that we do. We are all members of all the other groups; all of us guys also go and shoot wild pigs and foxes as well, hence why the numbers are low with that. But the studies I have given you some paperwork on, the first one that was done with deer-wise was out of Queensland, and they believe it puts \$1 billion from hunting into the Australia-wide economy. Another one there is three pages of

an executive summary out of a 168-page document that you are quite welcome to get off the Victorian website. But it is now up to well over \$400 million just in Victoria, and they are now going down the line of sponsoring with ecotourism to bring people in from all over the world. The deer they have in Victoria, one of them is a highly prized species, which, unfortunately, we do not have here, but we do have other deer that are a very prized species as well. They can really push now to go forward with that, and they are going to promote it all the way through. There are some other documents there; now that the government is seeing how beneficial hunting is to them, they are sponsoring shooting clubs now to build new clubhouses and include people. They are doing it in schools; the Field and Game actually runs target shooting at schools in country Victoria. It is just becoming more and more a part of the Victorian make-up, and they just see the benefit all the way through.

There is another piece of paper I have given you there off the New Zealand government website, which is about three parks: a state park, a national park and a forest park. The little captions there with them are actually straight off their website, and it tells you there are people camping, hiking, canoeing, fishing and hunting, and they all live in the paddock together. It is actually promoted to encourage the control of feral animals in New Zealand.

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: Are there any studies like this that have examined the control of the pest animals—the feral animals? Not just the economic benefit, the actual control?

Mr Stuart: I believe there are some out of New Zealand. Yes, I actually read through some of the submissions; there was another gentleman there who quoted some documents that said it was working in New South Wales as well.

Mr Mazza: Any pest animal taken out of the environment is a benefit to the environment, without a doubt. I personally hunt for food; I do not class myself as a shooter per se. Shooting, to me, is wasteful. I hunt what I take. I might go hunting five times and probably fire my weapon twice. I am very, very specific in what I take, and I just think that I am providing for my family. It is not for some sadistic pleasure, as some people would have you believe. It is not blood lust or anything like that; it is about providing my food. It is what humans have been doing since time immemorial, and I just feel that from a personal perspective there are a lot more people who would take up my style of hunting given the opportunity.

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: Would you say that at the moment you are the exception rather than the rule?

Mr Mazza: Unfortunately, yes, in this state, because we have a shooting culture in this state as opposed to a hunting culture, because it has always been done recreationally on private property to eradicate off property—off paddocks and things that like. Whereas in other states, where hunting has been part of their culture for many, many years, young people take it up from an earlier age and they are brought up with all that ethos towards hunting and, I suppose, cultural feeling for the animal or whatever it is that you have. I have a great depth of feeling for animals; there is no doubt about it. I would hate to see anything hurt or in pain, so I am very, very careful about the shots I take. I want to engender that in other people.

Mr Stuart: Our organisation has its training course, and that is what we teach: to be 100 per cent positive sure before a shot is ever taken.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Is there the opportunity in the other jurisdictions where you can value-add, whether it is deer, kangaroo or whatever? There are the professional kangaroo shooters, but we cannot buy Western Australian kangaroo; it is processed in South Australia. What would you guys like to see changed to make it a good venison that you can actually value-add on? What has to be done to the industry to make it better?

Mr Stuart: It has to be opened up quite a lot to allow people for the movement of animals as well. That has been a very hard part here. People like to take wild pig and they do eat them, but they can

get fined for taking a pig out of the bush. To open it up there is a lot of stuff that needs to be looked at across the whole thing. There is so much there. The pig factor; like Mark was saying, one pig stops 30 more that year if they take a female pig, and there are so many. I actually work in the Darling Scarp in dieback management and control, and how many pigs do you want to see a day just running through? The whole place is just full of them. They come onto people's land, and I have seen firsthand where they then rip that land up. All those people want is to eat that meat, but they want to clean them up first if they trap a pig in the bush. That would work for a lot of people, and they would eat the pork. It is not just the deer and that, it is the whole lot.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Yes, but you cannot go and supply, say, venison to an outlet now?

Mr Stuart: No.

Mr Mazza: If you have done a meat handlers course —

Mr Stuart: Yes, it is the same; you have to be licensed to do it all. But like we say, we would go and shoot one to put in our fridge.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: But say, like, the pet food industry —

Mr Stuart: We are not about going to eradicate and everything like that; we shoot for our own personal consumption. But our organisation over east, yes, they do some eradicating in the area, which is completely against what they do, but they understand, from the government department that comes to them, that it is causing problems. So to protect the species from becoming feral over there, they do it. They put themselves out to help, and only just recently—back on 26 July—they went and planted 2 000 seedlings in a bird swamp area that they take care of. They have been planting 2 000 trees there every year for the past seven or eight years in this area, and the benefits have just come out of it now. Everybody who went this time was able to go back through and see each stage. They do that in a lot of places—tree planting and that sort of stuff.

The CHAIRMAN: I just wanted to know, if there was to be a system introduced, do you think there should be a limit on the number of people who should be allowed in a hunting party at any one time? I just noticed that in this Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine information here—I was quickly having a look—there was a person who was deer hunting who got shot in the back of the head accidentally because there was a rustling in the bushes and the shooter took a pot shot and got someone in the back of the head instead. What that made me think was that if you had a large group of people out in a hunting party, it may be difficult to think about how many of us are out there and things. Do you think there should be a limit placed on the number who could hunt together?

Mr Stuart: If you browse through most of that, it is a book of idiots; all the stuff that has happened is all through stupid things that people have done. The people who were actually involved in that incident I personally know, and they were not doing the right thing. They were not wearing any high-visibility items. I read through a lot of submissions, and people have that problem with people in the bush that is all said off emotion. They do not understand that people do not hunt on that track where they walk; the hunting is done in the bush because those people scare these animals away and that is why they survive. The hunting area that people hunt is not anywhere near where the general public use. They may camp in those areas. I have read and heard stuff, but there is nothing majorly documented that says that the people are doing the wrong thing. I have confronted people where they have said because of what we do they just automatically want to tear us apart because it is not their belief. I do not have a problem with whatever their belief is, but because you kill something they attack you. The emotion in all this thing is just huge, and it is trying to dispel it.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think that hunters should automatically be wearing high-vis gear and so there should be strict —

Mr Stuart: I personally do.

Mr Mazza: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: So you would recommend that if there was to be a system put in place would we limit the numbers that could go out in a hunting party?

Mr Mazza: We would need to develop protocols, there is no doubt about it.

Mr Stuart: We have codes of conduct that we operate to. For deer hunting especially it is always high-visibility gear, because the deer does not notice high visibility. It will notice Omo on your pants, but it will not notice your orange hat.

[10.20 am]

Mr Mazza: As it stands in this state at the moment, there is no real training for hunting or even shooting. Most of the training is done in a controlled area or a controlled environment on a range, and not all people who have firearms licences in this state go to ranges. It is unfortunate, and that is where accidents happen. There is very little training. The father-son element has slowly dwindled out of the system, and young people get a firearms licence and they really have no formal training or qualifications whatsoever. That is what we are trying to engender here.

Hon RICK MAZZA: My question is about safety. There has been a lot of focus on firearm safety, but far more bushwalkers die bushwalking through being lost or without food supply or whatever the case is every five-year period than what there would be hunting accidents. Does the ADA do things like survival bushcraft in their training—things like river crossings to make sure that is safe—and other types of things?

The CHAIRMAN: Is that a dorothy dixer?

Mr Mazza: It could be.

Mr Stuart: Yes, we do. Part of the training is all the stuff they carry in their daypack, which may turn into a three-day pack. It is all about making sure you have enough gear and stuff to survive and make contacts, and GPSs and all that sort of —

Mr Mazza: EPIRBs?

Mr Stuart: EPIRBs, yes. All that sort of stuff, depending on where they go to hunt. The high country in Victoria is a very unforgiving place—I have spent a lot of time there. It can be beautiful one day, and then it snows on you and in half an hour's time you can get caught anywhere.

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: Obviously the organised shooting groups have very clear codes of conduct and training, and that is a good thing. I asked this question of previous witnesses: there is still an element within the shooting and hunting community that are not doing the right thing and we are struggling and the departments are struggling, and the associations, to manage those people as it is; how are we going to manage those people with an expansion of the system?

Mr Stuart: But is it to be an expansion, and by how much?

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: If we were to expand it, how we would manage it?

Mr Stuart: We have 80 000 shooters available to shoot; it is 80 000-plus, I believe, the number of gun licences that are out there. I do not hear of many recorded facts of major problems we have with it now. These people are taught to respect this; this is not something that is just given to you every day of the week. It would be highly respected and regarded, and we self-manage within our organisations as well.

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: But what about those not in your organisation? That is the issue that I am getting to. The department —

Mr Stuart: We have them on the road every day —

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: If I could just finish my question.

We had evidence from the departments that there are people doing the wrong thing. There is translocation happening, and that people are not necessarily taking animal welfare rights into

consideration. I acknowledge and applaud that you guys are doing the right thing, but there are groups that are not.

Mr Stuart: We agree. So charge them and lock them up. We do not want them involved in the sport we partake in, because they do give us a bad name.

Mr Mazza: What we are, sort of, advocating here is that one of the prerequisites would be some sort of control from organisations such as ours, which at the moment there is no requirement. That is the thing—legislating control of. At the moment there is no control of, even to the point where projects that are currently done on a government department by government department basis, there are differing standards —

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: No coordination?

Mr Mazza: There are no set safety standards for each department. Basically what this does is pull it all into one department and says, “Okay, this is the minimum standard”, or, “This is the standard we are going to run with, these are the protocols”, and we can manage it better that way. At the moment there is no management.

Mr Stuart: Unfortunately we are going to have that element no matter what we do; it is just a part of life. For us in what we do, we know it affects us more because of the emotional and the public side that looks at us. If we can stamp that out, that is just of more benefit to us. We do not have a problem putting someone in who does the wrong thing.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Mark, would you see a benefit to your association of having an association that you must be licensed to, to be a hunter?

Mr Mazza: Not so much that you have to be a member of the ADA —

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Yes.

Mr Stuart: Any organisation?

Mr Mazza: Or any organisation for that matter. But those organisations would set the standard for the licence to be acquired, if you know what I mean. So they would have to apply to the ADA, or whatever it is, to sit the test and to go through the whole initiation process, I suppose, to become a licensed hunter in this state.

Mr Stuart: It is done already in the New South Wales system, and the government does not even issue it; it is all of our organisations that issue the R-licence. Of what benefit that is to them, I really do not understand. If they want to control it and then let us give out the licence, it is pretty onerous, is it not? Whereas in Victoria you pass your firearms licence and testing and it is onerous straightaway on you, and people put people in.

The CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, thank you; that brings us to the end of our questions for today. We do thank you for taking the time to come and meet with us.

Hearing concluded at 10.25 am
