

# **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 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)**

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**Hearing commenced at 10.05 am**

**Mr JIM SHARP**

**Director General, Department of Parks and Wildlife, sworn and examined:**

**Mr KELLY GILLEN**

**Assistant Director, Regional and Fire Management Services, Department of Parks and Wildlife, sworn and examined:**

**Mr PETER SHARP**

**Director, Parks and Visitor Services Division, Department of Parks and Wildlife, sworn and examined:**

**Dr GEOFF STONEMAN**

**Director, Forest and Ecosystem Management, Department of Parks and Wildlife, sworn and examined:**

**The CHAIRMAN:** Let us start. We have the Department of Parks and Wildlife here today. Jim, you are very familiar with this process—I know you are—so I just need to go through the formalities if I may. Starting from the left, we will ask you to take either the oath or the affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

**The CHAIRMAN:** You all would 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 be aware of the microphones and try to talk into them, ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make a noise near them. Please try to speak in turn; it is easier for Hansard to identify who is saying what. 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 material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

Jim, you have given a very extensive submission to the inquiry, but is there an opening statement that you would like to make in support of your submission?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I guess just to briefly summarise the submission from our perspective. As an agency, we manage a large proportion of the state. For conservation, and public access and use it is about 28.5 million in specific reserves but there is also a large area that we are responsible for fire prevention, weeds and pest animals—another 89 million hectares. One of the major issues we have in managing the conservation values is managing pests and pest animals. In that program of managing pest animals, we obviously have, as indicated in the submission, engaged the recreational shooting groups as part of that activity. However, we have in our submission raised a number of issues related to recreational hunting per se. That has been amplified in our submission. We will

continue to work with recreational groups in terms of controlled active feral animal control programs. In our submission we have also touched on the issue. Aboriginal customary use is an activity for hunting as well. We have come essentially to amplify that submission which, as you indicated, is comprehensive and to amplify or elucidate anything you would like.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I am interested for you to talk to us about the department's activities at the moment in relation to feral animal management and if, in your view, a recreational hunting system could be extended to assist the department to a greater degree than what currently exists to help with the eradication of feral animals?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I think we have indicated in our submission that the contribution of recreational hunting per se is, in our view, somewhat questionable in terms of the research that is referenced in the document in terms of its outcomes and its benefits in relation to costs. There was always going to be a contribution in terms of removal of ferals, but I think the analysis that we have done of similar schemes and the outcomes that come from them in relation to environmental benefit and cost is, in our view, somewhat questionable. I ask Dr Stoneman to comment specifically in that area, seeing he has responsibility for our feral animal programs.

[10.10 am]

**Dr Stoneman:** I think one of the key things for a pest animal control program to be effective is that it really needs to have quite a significant impact on the species that you are looking to target, because most of these pest animals are highly invasive. They have usually got very high reproductive rates, so you would need to actually have a very big impact on a population before that starts to have an environmental impact or else you are simply removing animals which would be removed by competition between the different animals in that population. To have such a big impact on a population really requires a pretty well coordinated, integrated and targeted program in particular areas where those feral animals are having significant impacts on particular environmental values.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** You already have arrangements for recreational shooting organisations. Can you go into a bit more detail about what those arrangements are?

**Mr J. Sharp:** As Dr Stoneman indicated, where we have a controlled feral eradication program, there have been instances where we have worked with some of the associations to join in this part of that overarching control program. If there is removal of goats in a specific area and we have either an aerial shooting or any other type of program, there is an on-ground program, sometimes the groups are engaged to be part of the on-ground activities to supplement that.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** I am really interested in the logistics of that.

**Mr Gillen:** If you look at our current programs, probably the most active is with the pig work that is currently conducted in the southern forests. That is a joint arrangement with sporting shooters and also with the department of agriculture and local government, as well as ourselves, targeting specific areas within the southern forest for pig control. Pigs are a major issue in the southern forest. In that case, the sporting shooters bring to that arrangement their particular skills and expertise in shooting, their strong approach to coordination and safety in relation to shooting operations. They bring that strength to that group. There is that work in the southern forest. They have also been involved in some low-level deer control work in the southern forest as well. Elsewhere in the state, we have used sporting shooters to assist in feral goat control programs in the midwest where we used a small team a number of years ago to work with our staff, focussing on some small hot spots, if you like, where we have had goat numbers starting to increase. We have also used sporting shooters to support what you might call mop-up operations. After broad-scale aerial shooting, we have used support from those groups to support work in Kalbarri and also Cape Range National Park, a small amount of work in Kennedy Range National Park and also, as I said, in the midwest.

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**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** From a logistical point of view—this is not an area that I have a lot of expertise in—would those programs run over a day or weeks? How is it managed on the ground and who do you approach in terms of recreational shooting clubs—how is that managed?

**Mr Gillen:** From a planning point of view a lot of work actually goes into preparing for a program like that because if it is, for instance, national park or nature reserve where there is the potential for other people to be within the area, we need to plan for the closure of those areas and ensure that the closure is in fact effective. That requires both public advertising and signage, and often the manned closure of roads and access points. In terms of utilising the sporting shooters, we go through the association. They nominate people to be involved in that work. We obviously have to involve those people in the logistical planning for the operation, whether it be just a couple of days or whether it might go over a couple of weeks. Normally if we are running a program like that, it would be more than just a day. It would often be around about a week and sometimes longer. The trade-off for us is the extent to which we might need to keep areas closed. For instance, when we are shooting in Kalbarri National Park we need to close the key visitor sites in Kalbarri National Park. That affects commercial operators and other users significantly, so it has to be well planned and timed so that the impacts are reasonably managed on other park users.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** Is there a fee for the recreational hunters?

**Mr Gillen:** No, but we usually support their involvement through supporting their fuel and food and things like that.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** But the benefit for the department is that it bulks up the capacity —

**Mr Gillen:** It provides the shooting expertise where we might not necessarily have it at that particular time.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Gentlemen and members, my apologies; I did not introduce the members of the committee to you, and that was very remiss of me to have not done that. Because I have known you for so long, I would be so pleased if you would let me do that now. We have Hon Rick Mazza, who represents the Agricultural Region; Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson, representing the East Metropolitan Region; Hon Darren West, Agricultural Region; myself, Liz Behjat, North Metropolitan Region; Dr Julia Lawrinson, our advisory officer; Hon Nigel Hallett from the South West Region; and Hon Jacqui Boydell from the Mining and Pastoral Region, just so you know the regions that we represent, especially when Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson and I ask questions—we are the city girls here in this hearing, and we are on a very steep learning curve. Please accept my apologies for not doing that from the outset.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Clearly, there is a tremendous potential resource for you having such expertise of people who understand, as not a lot of training is required to go out and assist you in shooting these feral animals. I think that would be a great win for everyone. What sort of process do you have for a sporting shooter to get involved in these programs? Do they need to register through the Sporting Shooters Association? Do you have a register of all interested people and where they might be and whether they might be able to work in with what you are trying to do?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I will get Mr Gillen to amplify it. My clear understanding is that we do not deal with individuals; we deal with associations. That is where you deal with the issues of legal liability and all the other parameters that need to be dealt with.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** I was going there.

**Mr J. Sharp:** Okay, and also you know that various codes have to be met. There are codes of conduct in relation to meeting animal cruelty expectations, all those sorts of things, and an association knows and understands that. We deal with associations.

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**Hon DARREN WEST:** I presume there are lots of groups.

**Mr Gillen:** In particular we work with the Sporting Shooters Association and Western Australian Field and Game Association. They are the two key groups that we work with in WA.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** So for anyone to get involved, they would need to be part of those organisations?

**Mr Gillen:** Yes.

**Mr J. Sharp:** If I could amplify that. In relation to a range of recreational activities we deal with, there are significant advantages in dealing with state level associations or regional associations. For instance, we have formal arrangements with four-wheel drive clubs because the management of impacts and the standards and the behaviours are managed by the groups. In our policy settings, the priority goes to dealing with associations at a state level and then down from there, because we know that they have a framework of management control in their activities. It is not just specific to shooting; it is towards a whole range of groups.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** You sparked another question along that line. The organisations you talk of would be incorporated bodies. Who picks up the public liability insurance on these sorts of situations? Is it the incorporated body or the department?

**Mr J. Sharp:** We hold public liability for anyone who is undertaking the activity for us. We have an extensive policy. I think something like 7 000 volunteers work for us. We cover them.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** So any problems are your responsibility?

**Mr P. Sharp:** Yes. The volunteers are regarded as employees for that period.

**Mr J. Sharp:** The association would fall into that category as well.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** It is my understanding that in the New South Wales system, you have to be a member of an authorised club before you can get a licence. There are some parallels there.

**The CHAIRMAN:** One of the questions I have is in relation to competing views on the effect of recreational hunting on feral management. How reliable is the scientific data that is available on feral animal management?

[10.20 am]

**Mr J. Sharp:** In our submission we addressed what research was available. It indicated that there is questionable effectiveness in that space. That was the research that we went to and we quoted. Dr Stoneman might be able to add something.

**Dr Stoneman:** I guess if I could take another example, if we look at something like the Western Shield program, which is the state's major native fauna conservation program, a large part of that program is focused on the control of feral cats and foxes, which we mainly do through baiting. That program has been in place in one form or another for 15 years or so. We have a lot of data from that program where we know that it has been effective in controlling the number of foxes, in particular, and native fauna populations have been sustained for that period. There would be considerable doubt whether that would be the case without that program. Well-designed managed programs can be effective.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** I am just thinking that one through a little bit. I get the need for coordinated and managed programs, and that is great. I am just thinking of a situation. Could you think of an example where perhaps attempted management of feral species on an ad hoc or uncoordinated basis could be unhelpful to what you are trying to achieve?

**Mr J. Sharp:** If I could start and throw to Dr Stoneman. There are a couple of elements to that. There is the effectiveness issue. I think we have raised that in our submission. There are the costs of setting up the structure under which the ad hoc could occur because there is still state liability

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around it being ad hoc. If you have given approval, you still bear a whole range of responsibilities for other users of the land and employees. That is one of our primary questions. We also raise the issue, and it is not to denigrate shooters, but there are instances where it is counterproductive if you have a responsibility to shoot in an area to do it most effectively because it means there will no longer be any stock for the next year. We have quoted here where there have been instances where feral animals have been re-released to repopulate the area so there can be opportunities for shooting in the future. There are elements of it which are actually counterproductive to getting the outcome that we want.

**Dr Stoneman:** I think there are other examples where we have particular programs in place, I guess with things like feral goats where we use what we call Judas goats where we put trackers on particular goats and they lead us to where the others are. That is a controlled program so that we can then target a population. If you have ad hoc shooting, they may knock off that Judas goat and interrupt our program and also impact the behaviour of populations we are looking to target and make controlled programs more difficult to implement.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** The whole attraction to this is that you achieve two good outcomes if it works: you have a significant assault on feral animals and you give sporting shooters the opportunity to do what they like to do best. We need to consider it. There are always two sides to every coin.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** Just an outline, if you could. Sixteen wildlife guys for kangaroo shooting. What is their role? I would not think the industry would be that big to require 16 or can you see an advent of another industry attaching to it—being able to process for domestic consumption here instead of having to buy it from South Australia?

**Mr J. Sharp:** We have responded to that question about how many wildlife officers we have. We have 16. They are not solely related to that. They have a wide range of responsibilities but they have the primary responsibility in terms of kangaroo management because the licensing provisions are done under the Wildlife Conservation Act. They administer the compliance with the act.

**Mr Gillen:** Yes, amongst those 16, there are a wide range of activities, of everything from dealing with cetacean strandings and illegal activities, right through to the kangaroo part of it. If you looked at the dedicated amount of time for the kangaroo industry, it would be relatively small across those 16 people.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** I just misread it.

**Mr Gillen:** And of course, the kangaroo program is across the extent of the pastoral zone as well as the south west agricultural zone, so we have a lot of activity in terms of shooting both through the pastoral zone and the south west zone. That occurs at different times of the year. One of the key functions that they look after there is clients with the legislation making sure that people are utilising the tag system to tag the animals that are shot through that process so that we have a legitimate way of monitoring the actual shooting that goes across the populations of kangaroos to meet our targets that are set every year in conjunction with the commonwealth.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** Is there any appetite to sort of develop a domestic abattoir market here?

**Mr Gillen:** There is a group of the shooters involved in kangaroo culling who are authorised shooters for human consumption. They go through a course to meet that standard, so that market, if you like, is already being pursued by that group of individuals. It is not a big market but it is definitely there. You can find the result of that in local supermarkets. There is a small market place there for them.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** I wonder whether you can tell me how much feral animal control programs are costing each year?

**Mr Gillen:** Off the top of my head I cannot do that. Jim can you give us an indication?

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**Mr J. Sharp:** The way we conduct programs is that they are part of regional management activity so they are broken down by regions and by districts and activities as such.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Is that something I could get on notice?

**Mr J. Sharp:** You could get that on notice and we could pull that together.

**The CHAIRMAN:** For the purposes of Hansard, we will make that question A1, and that will be the provision of detailed costings with regard to feral management, broken down by region.

[*Supplementary Information No A1.*]

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** You mentioned earlier translocation of feral animals by hunters. Have there been any prosecutions of anyone translocating feral animals?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Not that I am aware of, but there was significant work done and it involved, as the paper that is quoted in our submission, working with DNA to follow these through.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** How would that work?

**Mr Gillen:** The work was conducted between probably the mid-2000s and 2010—up to about 2010. It was primarily focused on the midwest region and it was sampling feral pigs that were either shot or captured in the midwest area. The genetics of that population was tested by Peter Spencer from UWA and then compared to source populations in the south west forest and they were able to clearly demonstrate where certain pigs that were being sampled in the midwest had actually come from. They were able to relate that to specific parts of the forest.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Is that research conclusive? Have there been translocations or does it just suggest they are related?

**Mr Gillen:** As someone who worked in the midwest, I was certainly of the view that animals were being translocated. There was some work by the Department of Ag at the time to intercept some of that transport. I cannot recall whether that was successful or not. But certainly, there was a lot of activity in and around the midwest area where pigs had not been recorded before and suddenly we had pig populations occurring and then we had pig hunting occurring in those areas.

[10.30 am]

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** I just wondered about that because if it is an endemic problem, why there had not been any prosecutions if the department was aware of it. The other thing I want to ask is: does the department manage land on behalf of other agencies?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** When you manage land like, say, the Department of Lands, do you engage in feral animal control on those lands?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes, we would.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** How do you deal with the firearm legislation where the Department of Lands prohibits the use of firearms on those lands? How do you legislatively manage that?

**Mr Gillen:** In that instance in particular, where the department has responsibilities for feral animal control on unallocated Crown land around the state, through an MOU with the Department of Lands, the department has taken on the function of feral animal control as part of that arrangement, so we manage that arrangement. The feral animal control that occurs under those arrangements generally is by aerial shooting and we conduct that program often in conjunction with either recognised biosecurity groups around the state or with the Department of Ag or both.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** So firearms are used on that land through the authority of the other departments.

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes.

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**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** As a comment, really I suppose, the camels have caused a bit of grief over the last couple of years. I think it was in last week's paper where Wellards have now designed a boat for live export of camels. How do you see your role as control of them as feral? Is it a viable option now to target them towards live export?

**Mr J. Sharp:** That is a difficult one. There was extensive, as you are aware, camel eradication funded, I think, in the order of \$20 million or \$30 million. I stand corrected on that by the commonwealth government a few years ago. Whether it is viable as an export industry, I am not sure. I do not think we necessarily have a view of or knowledge around that. The issue would be whether you would need to have ferals continuing to run doing environmental harm as the basis for an industry. I guess it is a matter of whether they would be farmed or just ferals being removed as part of that industry but I do not think we have great knowledge of that.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** I heard in an interview and they said it was an option they were looking to control some of the wild camels and I wondered whether they had been working with you guys or where it was at.

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** In relation to discussion in the pastoral industry in particular around the management of feral animals and the impacts on their capacity to run small stock in particular, on UCL land where you are undertaking feral animal control programs, would you consider, if we had recreational hunting legislation and allowed recreational hunters to go onto UCL to hunt feral animals, would you see that as a plus for the department to be managing your programs, although I take your point about the potential to impact in a negative way? What is in your opinion of the potential to impact in a positive way, which in turn gives, I guess, a flow-on effect to the pastoral industry to manage those feral animals in particular, because the view I guess in the pastoral industry in particular is that feral animals and live dogs in particular are out of control. From a government perspective, how do you manage that? Is this a way to do it? I would be interested in your thoughts on the positive impact.

**Mr J. Sharp:** I think, as has been indicated in our submission, two issues need to be addressed in that. At face value, yes, removal of any ferals would seem to be a good thing but then there is a question implicit in our submission around efficacy. What does it deliver in terms of an outcome? Secondly, we addressed in our submission that of cost. What is the cost of establishing the framework by which this could be done in a way that is both efficient, gets an outcome, but also that cost? I guess that is the issue—the policy question—that we struggled with and with the knowledge and understanding we have. Is that the level of resources we saw being allocated, the \$2 million to \$3 million to run a system, whether that would be the best use of that resource to get that outcome. It sounds confused. In other words, if your objective is about the environmental outcome of removing ferals, then what is the best use of resource to get to that outcome, given it would need significant resources to manage it?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Could there not be a cost benefit, though, in relation to future tourism programs that you run in relation to recreational things, so not only would you get cost recovery but you could also be making profits in regard to these schemes because you would be attracting more people to the region to participate in a recreational hunting scheme?

**Mr J. Sharp:** We have not done the analysis, so it would be hard to comment on that, and we have not done the analysis around what the tourism benefit would be or we do not really have an understanding of what the level of tourism benefit would be. But in terms of the environmental outcome in relation to what we saw as the cost of administering, then that becomes the issue and then the effectiveness of the outcome.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** Do you think there is a risk to the tourism industry for such sort of broader recreational hunting, and there is the tourism reputation and environmental tourism?

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**Mr J. Sharp:** It is difficult to arrive at a position on that. I guess we can say that there have been benefits in other settings, not for feral animal control but for culling. At one level of tourism in Africa there are programs of, say, elephant controls where they raise—I forget what it is—a couple of hundred thousand dollars for the right to shoot the elephant as part of the cull, and that also generates specific high-end tourism in that hunting market. I do not know whether that would apply, though, in our setting.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** No. My question was more aimed at the tourism market—walkers, camping, you know, that sort of thing.

**The CHAIRMAN:** An eco-wilderness type of thing.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** Yes, eco.

**Mr J. Sharp:** I think we would have to make sure that there was a clear understanding in all of our programs as well that we are about essentially dealing with ferals. In some instances we have to reduce populations of natives, but they are under very specific circumstances. There would have to be an awareness and I think a differentiation in people's minds about that.

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** I just wanted to carry on a little bit further in my question around how you would fit in your eradication program that you were running as an agency with something like a recreational hunting program. Where you have different areas of the state set out on what your program is in relation to targeting feral animals in different areas, would you see how you would fit the jigsaw of that together with recreational hunting licence legislation. Could you see that working and what sort of framework would that be? Obviously in, say, the goldfields region, in particular the wild dog–feral problem is massive; whereas in other parts of the state, say in the southern region, the pig population is out of control. I would not want to see recreational shooters allowed on land and just going through it. So, how does that fit in with the agency's predicted management of feral animal control?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I guess the recreational hunting that has been part of our activities has been through having the program of feral animal control established first with some objectives, with some known outcomes so that we can monitor and see where that is going to get us and then going to a group—so that is how we see it working: going to groups—who can complement and be part of that program, which is a defined feral animal program. The difficulty we have had in working through this is where you do not have it as part of a designated control program, the management costs and the management effort in relation to the unknown outcomes becomes the issue. So where it becomes part of an established feral animal control program and activity, then clubs and associations can join in to be part of that with a designated role where standards are met and controls are met and safety issues are dealt with; if that makes sense.

[10.40 am]

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** Yes, it does. So, essentially, you would, if this was to come to play, have to see that reflected in your planning, and how you would work with those recreational shooters to achieve that.

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes, that is right.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** I have a couple more very good questions, which came out of Jacqui's question on the different species. There was reference to feral dogs and camels. I have had some experience in trying to eradicate wild dogs, and I would make the presumption that clearly in that instance I think the worst thing you do is shoot them because you can never get anywhere near them again to try to catch them. But clearly different species would have different best means of control. Which species would you consider would be the most beneficial under the proposal that has sort of been talked about now? You have mentioned that before you had a pig control program and a deer control program where you were often bringing in the expertise of recreational shooters to help. Which other species would you consider to be the most use?

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**Mr J. Sharp:** I will throw that to Mr Gillen, but it would be in the light of, and you are quite right about dogs, you need a dogging program as part of the shooting issue.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Yes, you are best to try to trap them; you cannot shoot them.

**Mr J. Sharp:** It could be actually counterproductive, but I think as Mr Gillen has referred to before, it eats into that mopping up activity.

**Mr Gillen:** I think pigs would continue to be a significant species that you could focus on. The other species where ground shooting in particular can be useful is in closing out operations on, say, goat control where when you start with high-density populations you can use other forms of treatments from mustering and trapping right through to aerial shooting. But once the numbers become quite small, the effort per animal is significant and that is where ground shooting with experienced shooters is very important. So, there is a potential in that area in particular.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** What about camels; are they just too far apart and hard to get at them in such programs, or too remote?

**Mr Gillen:** I think you have definitely got the issues of distance. You have got the logistical challenges of the fact that the camel species are basically on the edge of the pastoral zone. So, just getting people there and looking after people and resourcing a program is difficult, and that is why the main camel program in the last few years has primarily been aerial. I think that is a pretty difficult one. If you have a small pocket of animals in a relatively small geographical area, you might well be able to do it.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** With a Judas camel!

**Mr Gillen:** Yes!

**Hon DARREN WEST:** How many staff would you have who specialise in shooting? Clearly you would have some marksmen or shooters on your staff who would be pretty good at what they do.

**Mr Gillen:** We do have an aerial shooting team and that team is used in programs primarily, at the moment, in the Kimberley for feral cattle, but also feral goats and also a little bit of feral donkey work; although, at the moment it is primarily dealt with by the Department of Agriculture and Food. So six dedicated aerial shooters, but we also have people in each of our regions who, as part of their day-to-day work requirements, are licensed for firearm use and if the requirement is there, they will use that for feral animal control.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** The other question I had you touched on before when there was a question about management of land on behalf of other agencies, and you mentioned that you have an MOU sometimes with other agencies. I just want to talk to that a little more. I would presume your priority would be managing feral animals in areas of your jurisdiction, so parks and areas that come under your control. So I would presume that you would go out into other areas because you do not stop at the line. You need to control the population that may—or are there other examples of where you might undertake that work on behalf of other agencies at their request?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Primarily, the greatest responsibility is across unvested crown lands, which is about 89 million hectares, where the Department of Lands, without its capacity for on-ground management, 10–15 years ago, I cannot recall exactly when, transferred responsibilities for fire, ferals and weeds outside of the town centres to us as an agency with some limited funds to do that. So we actually have a responsibility to do that across that broader area of —

**Hon DARREN WEST:** So you are the go-to agency on feral animal control across —

**Mr J. Sharp:** Across that extra 89 million hectares of land as well as the land that is vested in the Conservation Commission under the current act, which is national parks and nature reserves and other reserve conservation parks. So we have, if you like, primary responsibility on managing those lands for all their values, but across that wider area we take that responsibility on unvested crown

lands. That reflects the fact that we are regionalised and we are more regionalised than many agencies; we have some capacity in those areas.

**Mr Gillen:** I suppose in response to your query, there are about—while we might tackle ferals in a particular area, the responsibility under the MOU was provided to us because there were seen to be efficiencies in—well, synergies between the programs that we are already conducting and potential to extend those into areas of UCL; so you actually dealt more holistically with the issue. The department's UCL program is obviously limited by the funding that is provided, so it has got to be a prioritised program that is reviewed annually.

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** We have talked a lot about the actual management of the feral animal program that you do, which has been really great. So the flipside of that—and we have not talked a lot about—is our visitors to our parks, and our extensive tourism industry where we have people accessing land all over the state who we do not know are there. I would be interested in your opinion on how you would manage something like that from an agency perspective and from a safety perspective for tourism.

**Mr J. Sharp:** That is a key consideration that we have as a responsibility as an agency. Our last year's figures—and I will stand corrected on this by Mr Sharp—was something like 16.7 million visits, which we record under our recording system. Now that is not visitors, it is visits, because many areas have multiple entry points. So that is—from our point of view, that is a huge level of visitation and use, and we have very accurate measures where we can have those measures, and we also—underpinning that, we also have a very extensive visitor risk management program because of the risk to business in terms of safety—of falling. And we do have deaths—fatalities—as well as significant injuries across every year. So we have a very extensive visitor risk management program.

We would count visitors in more intensively used areas, and we get estimates across particular sites. And where we do have that overlap, in the case you are mentioning, is in those wilder areas and more remote areas, we do have people who traverse those areas without us having a great deal of knowledge about them. So there are some issues that emerge in how do you manage those sorts of activities. And we also have some facilities that we have developed, which actually traverse areas across a range of tenures and uses—such as, say the Bibbulmun Track, which we project people onto, but it goes from Perth to Albany. So you are going across a whole range of different tenures and different uses, but they are primarily those that we have a responsibility for.

I think—and again, I will stand corrected—the last figure I had in terms of the visitation statistics that were done with our agency, with the Bibbulmun Track Foundation, was I think it was in the order of 145 000 walkers on that track at any time. Now again, they are dispersed across the track. We have people nominating and recording where they are—that is annually, sorry. So we try and monitor that. We have systems for trying to pick up where they might be in case of things such as wildfires, if there are bushfires, so we have got a warning system and all the rest of it. But safety is a critical issue for us; it is one of our prime responsibilities. We think that is important for maintaining both the credibility of the experience, but also maintaining our position. Western Australia's natural areas are its primary focus for a lot of its tourism and it is important that we maintain them both in an accessible and safe way. It is one of the challenges around this sort of activity.

[10.50 am]

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** Those national parks, part of their appeal is that they are so accessible; they are not locked up. They are open to people to do all those activities, and I suppose there is a risk of impinging on some of that accessibility if you have to manage a booking system where people are going to be shooting or something like that, yes.

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**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes, and I think as Mr Gillen outlined, where we do have to control ferals in those areas. So there are times when we have to close the parks for feral animal control programs. There are times when we have to close off parts of the Bibbulmun Track or the Munda Bididi Trail because we have got to do prescribed burning programs. It is important that we do it, so we close sections and reroute while we do those activities. In other words, there is a closure in dealing with it, but it is high effort and costly to do that.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I am afraid we are going to actually have to call time on the hearing because we have our next department ready to give us their submission. I have one quick question. In 2.2.5 of your submission, you talk about the existing programs that you have with the recreational shooting groups. You have indicated there in one of the programs that you had six shooters come with you to carry out a program. I am just wondering: do you have any figures on the actual number of recreational shooters that you use in those programs in the course of say, a 12-month period? How many recreational shooters are getting access to those programs that you are running with them?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I do not know whether we do have that recorded; simply I am not aware of that. Again, we could make our best endeavours to —

**The CHAIRMAN:** If you have that information, it would be good to see how many recreational shooters —

**Hon DARREN WEST:** We could also run that question after the —

**The CHAIRMAN:** Access, yes.

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes, okay.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes, we will do that.

Jim, as you can see, there is quite a lot of interest in this inquiry, and this is the first day of our hearings, so we are trying to squeeze as many in as we can in the course of one morning's hearings, but it may be that, in the course of what we do, there are further questions we have for you. So we may do that either by way of letter or email or, if necessary, perhaps another quick hearing with you, if you are amenable to that happening, perhaps later on. And thank you very much for coming in to speak with us.

**Mr J. Sharp:** Thank you.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We do appreciate you giving us your time. Thank you.

**Hearing concluded at 10.52 am**

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