

GAME AND FERAL ANIMAL CONTROL BILL 2018

Introduction and First Reading

Bill introduced, on motion by **Hon Rick Mazza**, and read a first time.

Second Reading

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [10.04 am]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Game and Feral Animal Control Bill 2018 provides for the regulation of hunting of game and feral animals on certain declared public land in Western Australia. This bill closely resembles the New South Wales Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002, which has been successfully administered in New South Wales. This bill implements a system that will provide positive environmental, agricultural, economic, social and community outcomes in a similar way to those of other jurisdictions in Australia.

Hunting is already a legitimate and valuable pastime currently taking place on private land with the permission of landholders, and also through declared species animal mitigation programs conducted by the Western Australian Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, in collaboration with approved hunting organisations. For the purposes of this bill, a “game animal” is an animal that is living in the wild and belongs to a species specified in schedule 1 of the bill, which includes, but is not limited to, cats, dogs, goats, foxes, hares, rabbits, pigs, deer, donkeys and camels, which impact on our environment and the agricultural sector.

This bill does not involve the indiscriminate hunting of animals; rather, it allows for the humane targeting of game animals and declared pests that need to be controlled using a structured, regulated system. Safety is a key public concern whenever game and feral animal control on public land is discussed. There are provisions within the bill to ensure that there are stringent safeguards for the safety of the public, other public land users and game hunting licence holders. To complement the numerous protections in the bill, there are robust procedures and tough penalties to ensure the compliance of those engaged in the activity of hunting. Inspectors will be appointed to enforce these provisions, with powers to stop and enter vehicles, enter places, obtain records, seize things, and apply for entry warrants.

Just like the New South Wales legislation, the Western Australian hunting system will involve the use of an online booking and GPS system, as well as a requirement to wear blaze orange clothing. The GPS system clearly identifies where a hunter is and where he or she is allowed to hunt. The booking system will also control when a hunter may hunt so that the safety of other land users and hunters is also ensured. The booking system will require participants to report back on the type and numbers of animals taken from declared public land at the completion of their hunt.

Large tracts of government land are breeding grounds for pest animals that then become problematic for both the environment and neighbouring private landholders. It is cost prohibitive for governments to manage pest animals on all its lands, and assistance from recreational hunters is currently an underutilised resource. “Public land” is defined in the bill as specified types of land under the Conservation and Land Management Act 1984, the Land Administration Act 1997 and any other crown land or class of crown land that is prescribed to be public land for the purposes of this bill. It does not include land that is occupied under any lease, agreement or similar arrangement for private purposes that confers a right to exclusive possession of the land, or a pastoral lease. The Bibbulmun Track, the Munda Biddi Trail and the Cape to Cape Track and other significant areas are excluded as public hunting land. Hunting by Aboriginal people and exclusive native title rights holders is not impacted on by this bill. The bill allows the minister responsible for the administration of the relevant land to declare that a specific area of public land be available for hunting under strict permit conditions. This strategic flexibility allows areas of land to be targeted for reducing game animals, while taking into account public safety and the rights of others to use the land.

The bill establishes a game and feral animal control advisory board, which will consist of at least five members and not more than seven. Its function will be advising the minister or the director general on any matter related to game and feral animal control, whether referred to the advisory board by the minister or the director general, or of its own volition; advising the minister or a responsible minister on any matter about which the minister is required to consult the advisory board under this bill; and, if the minister so approves, advising any minister on any matter related to game and feral animal control. The bill allows for the sharing of information between states to assess the eligibility of hunting licence applicants, allowing for better informed decisions when determining a person’s application.

The 2015 Standing Committee on Public Administration’s twenty-third report, “Report on Recreational Hunting Systems”, noted that feral animals cause environmental damage and economic loss to primary producers, as well as harm to native animals. The significant impact on both the environment and agricultural sectors costs hundreds of millions of dollars a year in either lost production or control measures. The report also found that there was an inconsistent approach by the then Department of Parks and Wildlife to engaging recreational hunters in organised and targeted feral animal management across different regions. The Game and Feral Animal Control Bill 2018

allows for a regulated year-round hunting system that will assist in addressing the vast and growing feral animal problem in Western Australia. Evidence from other jurisdictions also suggests that a regulated hunting system reduces occurrences of illegal hunting.

The Standing Committee on Public Administration's twenty-third report refers to the Game Licensing Unit in New South Wales and notes —

The GLU suggested that anecdotally there has been a decrease in illegal hunting since the introduction of a licensed recreational hunting scheme. The GLU produces educational material on illegal hunting in partnerships with organisations such as the NSW Police and the Forestry Corporation of NSW, and mobilises licensed hunters to provide intelligence on illegal activities, including but not limited to hunting.

Licensed hunters are a positive presence as they equal more eyes in the bush that can monitor and report to authorities illegal activity such as feral pig translocations. Hunters universally are responsible people and conduct their lifestyle and recreational pursuits with consideration and care. They are deemed to be fit and proper persons as a necessary requirement to obtain a firearms licence. They also need to be a fit and proper person to hold a game hunting licence. They hold down jobs, go about their daily business and contribute to society. They also want to participate in a legal and robustly regulated hunting system and add to their healthy lifestyle, which includes exercise, community spirit and a social outlet and, when appropriate, the taking of game food, which is a healthy, free-range product emerging as a popular choice for consumers and promoted on many cooking programs.

In WA alone, the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia—SSAA—has over 10 000 members and more than 70 clubs covering various types of shooting disciplines. Nationally, the SSAA has almost 200 000 members. The SSAA (WA) red card for rabbits and foxes, a community-based pest animal management program operating across the agricultural regions of Western Australia and coordinated by Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management Inc and SSAA (WA), indicates that in 2017, around 1 000 participants removed close to 10 000 pest animals, predominantly foxes, which have a devastating impact on agriculture and native wildlife. Proceeds from the program go to Wheatbelt Men's Health, a not-for-profit organisation formed in May 2002 to raise awareness of and contribute to the betterment of men's health and wellbeing.

It is estimated that there are over 640 000 recreational hunters and shooters across Australia. The 2019 federal government report, "Economic and social impacts of recreational hunting and shooting", found that overall, hunters and shooters are more likely to meet sufficient physical activity requirements than the average Australian adult; 58 per cent met physical activity recommendations, compared with only 44 per cent of Australian adults. The proportion with sufficient physical activity is higher for those who hunt and shoot more often, an indicator that hunting and shooting is contributing to meeting physical activity guidelines. The report also found that hunting is beneficial for mental and physical health in the way in which it engages participants with nature. Many hunters are older males, who are at greater risk of social isolation, placing this demographic at higher risk of health problems related to physical inactivity. The report noted —

People are more likely to engage in physical activity if they are part of social networks that encourage it, particularly as they age ... and any activity that promotes maintenance or strengthening of social connections is also likely to promote wellbeing as a person's social networks are strong predictors of their physical and mental wellbeing.

The report further found —

... gentle exercise that occurs in outdoor settings has greater overall benefits for health and wellbeing compared to exercise occurring in an indoor setting such as a gym ...

The economic benefits from recreational hunting and sport shooting are also significant. The report found that the contribution to gross domestic product, or the economic footprint, from recreational hunting and sport shooting activity in Australia in 2018 was estimated to be \$2.4 billion, comprising \$800 000 directly and \$1.6 billion as a result of flow-on economic activity. A high-sensitivity analysis of active hunters and shooters found that the potential contribution to national GDP could be as high as \$6 billion, while full-time equivalent employment could be as high as 48 000. The report also found that Western Australia's total gross expenditure on recreational hunting in 2018 was \$123 million. When broken down, that was \$38 million for on-trip expenses and \$85 million for off-trip expenses. That economic activity was generated through the purchase of goods and services, such as hunting equipment, food, fuel, groceries and accommodation within regional communities. That is well behind New South Wales, where the report found that gross expenditure on recreational hunting and sport shooting in 2018 was \$650 million, comprising \$237 million for on-trip purchases and \$413 million for off-trip purchases, while in Victoria gross expenditure on recreational hunting and sport shooting in 2018 was \$512 million, being \$192 million for on-trip purchases and \$320 million for off-trip purchases.

As a member for the Agricultural Region it is important to me that economic benefits reach the regions. The report titled “Estimating the economic impact of hunting in Victoria in 2013” shows how hunting-related expenditure can enrich country towns. It states —

Total hunting-related expenditure by game licence holders in the top 20 towns was estimated to be \$135 million, which accounts for 54 per cent of total non-metropolitan hunting-related expenditure by game licence holders (\$250 million).

The report also noted —

There were a total of 56 towns in which hunting expenditure was estimated to be \$1 million or more. In three towns/cities, Traralgon, Rosedale and Mansfield expenditure was estimated to be more than \$10 million. In a further eight towns/cities expenditure was estimated to be between \$5 million and \$10 million.

The Game and Feral Animal Control Bill 2018 will greatly benefit the WA economy, the natural environment, and the physical and mental wellbeing of people engaged in the activity of hunting.

Pursuant to standing order 126(1), I advise that this bill is not a uniform legislation bill. It does not ratify or give effect to an intergovernmental or multilateral agreement to which the government of the state is a party; nor does this bill, by reason of its subject matter, introduce a uniform scheme or uniform laws throughout the commonwealth.

I commend the bill to the house and I table the explanatory memorandum.

[See paper 3416.]

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.