

GAME AND FERAL ANIMAL CONTROL BILL 2018

Second Reading

Resumed from 21 November 2019.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Environment) [10.09 am]: I was going to wait and listen to a few other speakers first, but I thought that the opportunity might not arise so I should stand and make my contribution. I indicate at the outset that I am the lead speaker on behalf of the government, so I will not be adhering to the 45-minute time limit on the clock. Thank you for fixing that, although I do not intend to regale members for days, as do some others on legislation that I deal with in this place.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I am sure there will be ample opportunity for everyone else to make a contribution today.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The Game and Feral Animal Control Bill 2018 was introduced in this place in November 2019, and obviously it is before us today for consideration. The second reading speech of the Game and Feral Animal Control Bill refers to the 2015 report of the Standing Committee on Public Administration titled “Report on Recreational Hunting Systems”. At that stage, the committee was chaired by Hon Liz Behjat in the former Parliament. I was a member of this place then and I remember the debate on that report at the time. There are a number of findings in the twenty-third report that are of particular relevance to the environment portfolio in relation to biodiversity and conservation outcomes and management of the conservation estate.

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, minister, but I am just going to interrupt. There are a number of conversations happening around the room that are making it a little bit hard to hear the minister, so if you need to have a discussion, you might want to take it outside and let the minister be heard, please.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thanks very much, Madam President. I will try to speak up as well so that you can hear me, given that you are listening so intently this morning.

Finding 4 in that report states —

The Committee finds that there is a lack of conclusive data on the effectiveness or otherwise of recreational hunting as a form of feral animal control. There is a reliance on either small scale scientific studies or anecdotal evidence or speculation to inform conclusions on both sides of the debate.

There does not seem to have been any additional information or data provided since the release of that report in 2015.

Finding 5 states —

The Committee finds that there is an inconsistent approach by Department of Parks and Wildlife to engaging recreational hunters in organised and targeted feral animal management across different regions.

I have had conversations behind the Chair with and correspondence from Hon Rick Mazza on this issue. I am aware that the Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions has worked with recreational hunters around the state and has worked to engage recreational hunters in organised and targeted feral animal control in various areas around the state. I think there has been movement since that report was released in 2015.

Finding 6 states —

The Committee finds that the granting of recreational hunting licences may affect native title rights and interests, and therefore may be viewed as a future act under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth).

This and indeed other native title findings remain an important issue for us all to consider.

Finding 10 in the report states —

The Committee finds that animal welfare is a significant concern and consideration for animal welfare associations, government departments and organised recreational hunting groups.

Animal welfare is not just a significant concern for those stakeholders mentioned; it is also of increasing interest to the general community.

The recommendation of the committee in the twenty-third report was not unanimous. It states —

The Committee recommends that the Government introduce a two-year trial of recreational hunting on public land in Western Australia, taking into consideration the following issues that should be addressed:

- **native title and legislative requirements**
- **carrying out a thorough risk management assessment**
- **measuring the impact on feral animal numbers**
- **measuring the impact on the local economy and tourism in nearby areas**
- **implementing an online booking and GPS tracking system following the New South Wales model.**

The trial should be located in two separate areas, such as a reclaimed pastoral station in the Mining and Pastoral region and a state forest in the South West land division.

The then government's response was tabled in this place on 10 March 2015. It states —

The Government acknowledges the work undertaken by the committee and the reports it has produced.

However, the Government has resolved to not conduct a recreational hunting trial as recommended by the committee. The trial is not supported for reasons including the safety of the community, the doubtful effectiveness in control of feral animals, animal welfare issues and the significant resources required to establish and administer such a trial.

The primary reasons, though, were community safety and the significant resources required to establish and administer such a trial. In the absence of a trial, the issues the committee identified as needing to be addressed have not been addressed. However, as I indicated, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions has enabled recreational hunting on DBCA-managed lands through a memorandum of understanding and has managed the process in various places around the state. From this process established in 2017, the department has been able to respond to some of the committee's findings, including findings 4, 5 and 10.

The bill before us today seeks to allow for the regulation of hunting of game and feral animals on certain public lands. Public land is proposed to be defined with reference to Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 and Land Administration Act 1997 land, including unallocated crown land and unmanaged reserves, and any other crown land or class of crown land that is prescribed to be public land. Certain other pieces of land have been excluded from such declarations, including Kings Park, Bold Park, the Rottnest Island reserve, the Bibbulmun Track, the Munda Biddi Trail, the Cape to Cape Track and World Heritage properties. The bill provides for the declaration of areas of public land to be available for hunting game animals, with provision made for the regulations to exclude national parks, conservation parks and class A nature reserves from the declaration. No provision is made to exclude other CALM act lands from a declaration—for example, other than class A reserves or state forest.

Part 2 of the bill seeks to establish an advisory board to be appointed by the minister responsible for administering the act. The advisory board would have five to seven members and would advise the minister with responsibility for the act on various matters related to game and feral animal control and certain matters on which the minister is required to consult the advisory board, such as approving hunting clubs or codes of practice.

Game animals are listed in schedule 1 of the bill or may be prescribed in the regulations. The species that are listed in schedule 1 are those that are declared to be pests under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007, and include cats, dogs, goats, foxes, hares, rabbits, pigs, red deer, fallow deer, donkeys and camels. Native species can be classified as a game animal only if the species is also listed as a pest under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act. The take of native species is regulated under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. Native species that could be eligible to be prescribed as a game animal include the dingo, agile wallaby, emu, galah, sulphur-crested cockatoo, rainbow lorikeet and multiple corella species.

The bill provides for game hunting licences to be granted subject to conditions to a person to undertake game hunting on public land declared for this purpose. A licence holder must be a member of an approved club and have undertaken training considered adequate by the director general of the department responsible for administering the legislation.

Although it is unclear whether the bill seeks to regulate only recreational hunting or whether the regulation of commercial hunting is also being contemplated, the information I will give members now is based on the legislation relating to only recreational hunting. The only native species currently commercially harvested in WA are the red kangaroo and the western grey kangaroo, and this industry is regulated through licences under the Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2018 and in accordance with the wildlife trade management plan that is endorsed under the commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

The McGowan government supports appropriate measures that will reduce the number of pests and pest animals and their impact on native species, but we also believe in sound public security and safety, and animal welfare conservation and economic outcomes, too. To be effective, pest management control needs to be well-managed, targeted and coordinated. Recreational shooting on its own may not be effective because it is not conducted at a scale or in a way that would have a significant impact on pest animal numbers.

I have to say that there is a question mark over the necessity to legislate for these activities, given a number of outstanding issues, including the existing mechanisms and programs that are there to deliver environmental and conservation outcomes, community views on safety, the regulatory burden and cost, the demonstration of benefit, and consistency with government priorities. I will work through those issues briefly. I am aware that this legislation is based on legislation that has passed in New South Wales. Many moons ago, I was chief of staff for an environment minister in Victoria, so I am aware that elements of this bill are in operation in that state, too, albeit not in the same format, but some of these acts currently happen in Victoria.

I will talk firstly about recreational hunting on Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions—managed lands. As part of a targeted strategic program, recreational hunting can be effective. I have said that in this place before and I am happy to say it again. DBCA has a memorandum of understanding in place with six recreational shooting groups across Western Australia—that is, the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia Western Australia, the WA Field and Game Association Inc, Conservation Australia Inc, West Australian Hunters and Shooters Union Australia, the Australian Deer Association, and South West Hunting and Conservation Inc. There are three active projects with recreational hunting groups in Swan, Warren and the midwest regions. The targets are feral pigs, goats and large feral herbivores. Those projects have been designed in collaboration with interested hunting groups that have approached local DBCA officers. For the main part, the reports I get back are that they work well. The department is thankful for the support of those groups on the ground locally, and I think the quid pro quo is that recreational hunters are happy to participate in them.

The areas that are suitable for recreational hunting are identified based on species and the density of pest animals, the suitability for closing sections of the area while hunters are active, and the interests of the group. On-site risk assessment, safety induction and the development of a detailed and coordinated works plan and ground shoot plan, as well as a communication plan and a search and rescue plan ensure the safety of everyone involved in the shoot, and it is overseen by the departmental coordinator. The coordination of organised culls is important to ensure not only public safety, but also animal welfare outcomes.

The bill largely mirrors these current arrangements in the proposed game hunting licence provisions. Specific legislation is not currently necessary to provide for recreational hunting of pest animals given the existing processes that are in place. The most successful projects thus far include goat control in Avon Valley and Walyunga National Parks and some deer monitoring and control work undertaken by the Australian Deer Association in the Warren region. There are existing opportunities for groups to work on projects in the remote regions of the goldfields, the midwest and the wheatbelt. However, I have to say that the logistics and skills required and the lack of large numbers of animals in these areas has resulted in little interest or action. They are difficult areas to get to, but opportunities currently exist and could be taken up.

I want to touch on recognised biosecurity groups and their role in pest animal management. Of course, there have recently been some questions asked about those groups in this place. RBGs are recognised by the Minister for Agriculture and Food and operate under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007. DBCA works closely—in some areas better than other areas, I have to say—with RBGs to manage pest animals on DBCA-managed lands according to the priorities of those groups, and in some cases members of RBGs are also members of recreational hunting groups in those localities. The Blackwood Biosecurity group actively manages a range of pest animals both on and off DBCA-managed lands, which is a very good example of a successful pest animal control program involving RBGs and volunteers. The role of RBGs is important to strategic pest animal control across land tenures, and it provides what I believe is a really effective method of pest animal control delivery mechanisms and training. It is important that the government continues to support these groups in their activities over other pest animal control interest groups, given that they receive state funds and rate levy payments to deliver strategic pest animal control.

I will briefly touch on the Aboriginal ranger program. We have spoken on this previously. The McGowan government has invested \$20 million over five years to help traditional owners to jointly manage country. The program has been delivering not only jobs and skills throughout regional and remote Western Australia, but also positive economic outcomes for Aboriginal communities. Under that program, existing and emerging Aboriginal organisations can employ and train rangers to carry out a range of works on land across the state. The program is tenure blind. The land involved does not have to be state-run or state-owned land; it can be parks or Indigenous protected areas designated by the commonwealth. Land and sea management activities undertaken by ranger programs include, among others, not only feral animal control and management, but also biodiversity monitoring and research, and weed and fire management, depending on where they are around the state. This program has been successful thus far. As I said, these ranger groups are and have been involved in feral animal control around the state. Training is provided to the rangers in all sorts of areas to ensure that they have a wide range of skills, including skills relating to feral trapping, fauna management and handling, pest management and 1080 bait training. Twelve of the projects that were funded under rounds 1 and 2 of the ranger program have been actively working towards improving feral animal management. By the end of the 2019–20 financial year, rangers had carried out feral animal management over 965 000 hectares around the state, so that has been a positive contribution to feral animal control across the state.

I will touch briefly on the red card for rabbits and foxes program. The red card for rabbits and foxes community-based feral animal management program that operates across the agricultural regions has been sponsored by the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia Western Australia and the Regional Men's Health Initiative. It is a good program that has worked to increase the awareness of men's health in regional communities, and it is a good example of an existing well-coordinated community program. The program is very active, with shoots and baiting activities advertised regularly on the website and community notices, and through community engagement. That project has been having a great impact through coordinating teams to conduct baiting and shooting activities at the same time across the landscape. Fox bounties have previously been proposed in Western Australia. Although they provide opportunities for positive benefits, there are significant challenges with the concept. The Centre for Invasive Species Solutions, through PestSmart, provides a range of information on responding to key pest species, including foxes. The challenges to successfully implement a fox bounty include a focus on reducing population size, rather than minimising damage, and that is not consistent with state and commonwealth pest animal strategies for best practice. Another challenge is that the bounty system does not promote strategic removal of foxes but provides for an ad hoc approach that can be inconsistent with policy and best practice in Western Australia. Bounty systems need considerable supervision to ensure that only target species are taken and that restrictions on locations or times are followed. Bounty payments create a source of income that may not encourage long-term control or permanent reduction of pest numbers, with evidence suggesting that some shooters selectively take younger, easier-to-target animals, leaving older breeding programs in place.

We have a number of other programs across state government including Western Shield, which seeks to bait on state-managed land across the state, and that has been significant. About 7 000 volunteers have participated in the Western Shield camera watch webpage that helps classify a significant number of remote camera images that contribute to the monitoring of native fauna, their predators and things such as feral cats and foxes, particularly in the northern jarrah forest. There is a range of other programs and work being done across the state.

We have been trying to streamline government over the past few years to reduce red tape. I think, Hon Rick Mazza, that the creation of a new advisory board and new processes and licensing regimes will add complexity and regulation across the state. It risks creating duplication and overlapping of current processes that are undertaken by my department but also, in some cases, by the agriculture part of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. It is not compatible with our commitment for more effective regulation as part of our Streamline WA framework, because that aims to improve the way we develop and apply regulation in WA. We basically want to ensure that Western Australians are confident that the risks are well managed, regulatory requirements are clear and easy to understand, and that our decision-making addresses risks, and focuses on outcomes. We want to apply regulation consistently and reduce overlap and duplication. We want government information application processes to be available online for maximum efficiency. In making regulation more effective, Streamline WA seeks to encourage investment, which will make it easier to do business and create more jobs in WA. I am not sure that the bill before us will help in that regard.

Over the past few weeks and, in fact, in last week's budget, members will have seen a significant investment by the McGowan government in the tourism sector, but much of that has been in our national parks and reserves across regional Western Australia. We have made significant investments in parks in far-flung places. Since March this year, since COVID and once the internal borders were lifted, there has been a desire by Western Australians to get out there and explore our state. They well and truly have grasped the Wander Out Yonder slogan and everybody has been right across Western Australia, many for the first time. They are getting out to those more remote locations around the state, such as Mt Augustus, that some people got to previously, but many more are getting there now. We have made a significant investment in many of those parks. We have put money into the Munda Biddi Trail and the Bibbulmun Track; we have put money into parks in the southwest, like Torndirrup National Park; and we have upgraded trails in the Porongurups. Right across the state, we have made a significant investment in those parks. That work is starting now and it is to be rolled out in the next 24 months.

I am anxious, honourable member, about bringing in a new regime to make it easier to shoot in national parks and reserves in Western Australia at the same time we are encouraging Western Australians to get in there, experience them, camp, and enjoy themselves. An ongoing fear of mine is a tourist off the beaten track getting shot in a park. It is a real concern. When I spoke about the programs that are currently in place between sporting shooters and my department to target feral animals around the state, I touched on the significant planning that goes into making sure that we can do that. Safety plans have to be in place, including on-site risk assessments, safety inductions and those types of things; detailed and coordinated work plans, and ground shoot plans. If we were to expand that significantly, which I think the bill before us would do, it would be very onerous on the state and costly, I have to say. There will be costs associated with the creation of a board and a new licensing regime, and the bill quite clearly says the members of that board should be remunerated. The matter of costs is a smaller issue because as a result of this bill, if it passed, I would need to seek an appropriation from the Expenditure Review Committee to fund it. Not only that element, the more costly element and the thing that concerns me and frightens me the most is the

potential exponential expansion of what we currently have in place across the state. I think it would be very costly, and those security and safety issues rest heavily on my mind.

As I said, I have been wanting to speak on this for days. This is the Parliament; it is an opportunity for members of all parties to bring forward legislation. Hon Rick Mazza has brought forward a piece of legislation that he obviously cares about. Having sat in this place and been involved in conversations with him over the past two Parliaments, I know that this is something he is passionate about and that his stakeholders want. I have been happy to work with him when I could and when I thought it was appropriate to enable recreational shooters to participate in this scheme, when we could work together and they could get what they want out of it, but the state could tackle some of those feral animals that are pests that cause problems for our native fauna. I have happily worked on that, but for me the costs and the safety issues associated with it are a step too far. I indicate on behalf of the government that we will not be supporting the bill. I understand Hon Alison Xamon has amendments to the bill on the supplementary notice paper, so I presume we will go into Committee of the Whole House at some stage, so I will take the opportunity to ask Hon Rick Mazza some questions at that stage. There are some things I want to tease out to make sure that the member has thought them through, so I will do it at a later stage. I finish my contribution there.

HON CHARLES SMITH (East Metropolitan) [10.37 am]: I rise to make some comments regarding the Game and Feral Animal Control Bill 2018, as introduced by Hon Rick Mazza. Hunting can certainly be a controversial topic for many people, particularly the hunting we see on television and, over the last few years, on social media of so-called big game hunting, which I think is quite unsavoury. Those of us who are not lucky enough to have been acquainted with country living for any significant amount of time do not have the benefit of hindsight or knowledge when it comes to the issues of the types of pest management that this bill refers to.

As a former police officer in regional Western Australia, I have significant experience in pest management, albeit of a different kind! Although that was a facetious comment, after living in rural and remote Western Australia and travelling around those areas, I have experienced and seen for myself some of the damage that can be caused by pests, particularly introduced pests. Travelling to rural communities in Western Australia—up through Warburton, across to Tjuntjuntjara, into Kintore in the Northern Territory, and even further north—what really surprised me on those adventures was the significant amount of damage caused by packs of domesticated dogs roaming around on the exteriors of those communities. I found my first experience of watching that quite bizarre. These packs of domesticated dogs had gone feral and wild. They can be huge in number, up to 100 or more—huge packs of dogs that trash the surrounding environment.

Hon Jim Chown: Are you sure they weren't dogs out of the local pound?

Hon CHARLES SMITH: They live around the exterior of these towns.

Hon Jim Chown: I have never seen a pack of 100 wild dogs in my life.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: There are flipping hundreds of them out there.

Hon Jim Chown: It is not how they operate.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: Anyway, the humane hunting of wildlife for the purposes of population control and the minimisation of the associated damage is nothing new in Western Australia. Take, for example, grey kangaroos. Hunting grey kangaroos is a very common practice, due, in part, to how quickly the kangaroo population can increase and cause damage, especially around agricultural areas. The hunting is usually authorised under fauna licences. I think they were previously called open season permits—is that right, Hon Rick Mazza?

Hon Rick Mazza interjected.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: Absolutely; okay.

We know that pest control is already undertaken in WA—feral goats, deer, foxes, cats and dogs. The hunting of those animals is done by baiting, trapping or shooting. It is worth noting that there is an important difference between permission to hunt on crown and private land. From reading the second reading speech and associated notes, this bill will address that.

The bill appears to modify the WA model somewhat, and provides additional oversight in respect of hunting non-native pest animals, and native animals in certain circumstances. I will stop to labour that point. Australia has unique and beautiful wildlife, entirely different from anywhere else in the world. Of course, I support conserving and protecting those animals. However, I also recognise that Western Australia, as does the whole country, has a massive issue with introduced species that can, and do, wreak havoc on our native animals. All of us are aware of the damage that introduced species such as cats and foxes do, and the significant effect on our native species. For that reason, I have cause to support this bill. It is important to me to conserve the beautiful animals we have in Western Australia; after all, the cute quokka is a Western Australian icon. We are not talking about causing damage or harm to bilbies, quokkas, bandicoots and so on, or any of our endangered and protected species. The

bill seeks to humanely manage Western Australia's pest populations of harmful animals and provides the appropriate oversights for that to happen. As such, I am happy to support the bill through its second reading and committee stages.

HON AARON STONEHOUSE (South Metropolitan) [10.43 am]: I rise today to speak on the Game and Feral Animal Control Bill 2018. I do not intend to speak for too long as I know that a few members are eager to speak on this bill before we go to a second reading vote. Although I am not the architect of this bill, I find that the policy intent quite closely aligns with the policies of my party, the Liberal Democrats, especially in the way that it attempts to solve a problem in quite a creative and innovative way. It is really testament to an approach of making government work smarter rather than harder, by taking advantage and exploiting a pool of resources and talented people to solve a problem rather than hiring bureaucrats and public servants to do it for us. I think it is a fantastic idea.

As we all know, feral and pest animals cost this state hundreds of millions of dollars; in fact, quite possibly in excess of \$650 million, according to figures I have found from my research. The idea that there may be a way to put in place pest controllers, or hunters, to tackle this problem in a way that does not cost taxpayers any money—in fact, in a way that these pest controllers will be willing to pay for the privilege to engage in that activity—is actually a brilliant idea. It is genius in its simplicity. It is such a brilliant idea that other states and jurisdictions already do it. As we have heard, New South Wales and Victoria, and I am sure other jurisdictions across the commonwealth and across the English-speaking world, already engage in this practice. Of course the effectiveness of this might be in question in certain areas and as a whole, but it is being engaged in in other jurisdictions. We can learn something from that.

Previous speakers have referred to the twenty-third report of the Standing Committee on Public Administration, which made some very specific recommendations about hunting on public land. Members will be aware of recommendation 1, found on page 65 and in the executive summary of that report, which says —

The Committee recommends that the Government introduce a two-year trial of recreational hunting on public land in Western Australia —

That was after taking into account, of course, a few considerations that the committee highlighted in its findings. It is rather interesting. The committee did not recommend that the government give carte blanche to hunters; to let loose a bunch of rednecks with shotguns into state forests and parks to shoot at anything that moves. The committee absolutely did not recommend that.

I look forward to hearing contributions from members of this place who were actually part of that inquiry, and who had dissenting recommendations and authored a minority report. Based on my reading of the minority report, I suspect that that strawman I illustrated may be the view held by the minority of that standing committee in its twenty-third report. The committee did not recommend that at all, and this bill does not seek to do that at all. In fact, if members look at part 2 of the bill, on pages 8 and 9, they will find that this bill will establish a game and feral animal control advisory board. The game and feral animal advisory board will be established to advise the minister, or the director general, on matters such as the suitability of land for hunting and the suitability of specific species for hunting. Members will be aware that part 3 will put in place a very comprehensive and very stringent licensing regime. This is not some kind of laissez faire open season, shoot-at-anything-that-moves kind of bill. That is a caricature. Anybody who tries to make that characterisation would be embarrassing themselves. The proposed regime is very comprehensive. It has been expertly crafted. Clause 42, under division 2, relates to inspectors. At every page and at every clause there is commonsense regulation and oversight, and a need for compliance. I think this is perhaps one of the most commonsense pieces of legislation we have ever had when it comes to matters of hunting and firearms. It is quite refreshing to see in fact.

I referred to the minority report of the Standing Committee on Public Administration that makes farcical, outlandish, asinine comments about American gun culture. I hate to pre-empt detractors of the Game and Feral Animal Control Bill 2018, but this is my only chance to do it because I will not get a right of reply, of course. It is silly, cartoonish and ignorant to make those kinds of comparisons. Making use of skilled, professional, fit and proper hunters to tackle a problem that affects the whole state is not American-style gun culture. New South Wales and Victoria already do this. In fact, I remind members that Western Australia already does this. We heard from the Minister for Environment that Western Australia already engages in this practice. Of course, the current approach is more targeted and selective, whereas this bill seeks to put in place a more comprehensive and broader approach that can be applied to different parcels of land and species as needed with appropriate oversight, but this is already being done in Western Australia, across the commonwealth and in other countries. It is, in fact, best practice when it comes to conservation, and that is what this bill is all about. It is about conservation, stewardship and effective land management. We all know—unless we are being dishonest—that hunting plays a part in that. Of course, when it comes to pest and feral animal control, options are available. We have baiting and poisoning, but that does not solve all the problems and we cannot slap a bandaid on this issue. Hunting plays a part in pest and feral animal control. Hunting is not a silver

bullet—pardon the pun—and it does not solve all the problems, but it plays an important part when it comes to pest and feral animal control, and we know that. No-one can deny it; it clearly plays a part. We already do this.

We heard from previous speakers about the fantastic red card program that targets rabbits and foxes through a coordinated community predator management program. It is an absolutely fantastic program. The Minister for Environment mentioned, but it bears repeating, that the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia WA sponsors that program and donates \$5 to the Regional Men's Health Initiative for every cat or fox culled through that program. It is fantastic to see a non-government association putting its money where its mouth is and making that donation to the Regional Men's Health Initiative. Based on the figures on its website, it has raised in excess of \$50 000 and I would not be surprised if it is more by now. This program has local government authorities, the state government and non-government associations such as the SSAAWA working together in concert to tackle the problem of feral and pest animals, while at the same time raising money for a fantastic program such as the Regional Men's Health Initiative. We already understand that hunting plays an important part in feral animal control. This bill merely seeks to create a regulatory framework to allow these kinds of programs to be expanded and put in place across the state where appropriate. That is not to say that it should be done everywhere. This bill contains very strict definitions such as those in clause 3 in which the land is defined and declared; it does not provide hunters with an open slather or give hunters carte blanche, like I said.

I mentioned before that this is best practice. I am a big advocate of having in place firearms and hunting laws that regulate the activity in the interest of public safety. We should not have arbitrary rules in place or rules that target one sector of our society because we think that their activity is bad or wrong. Instead, we should have regulations in place for the furthering and advancement of public safety. This bill adequately addresses that with the advisory panel, the licensing regime and the requirement for GPS tracking and inspectors. This all sits within our existing Firearms Regulations. A person has to be fit and proper to obtain a firearm in the first place and the Commissioner of Police has the ability to deny somebody a firearms licence if he thinks that they are not fit and proper, such as on mental health grounds. It makes quite a lot of sense.

Much might be said about the efficacy of hunting and what impact it may have on the feral and pest animal populations, but it is certainly worth trying to see whether we can replicate some of the positive results in other jurisdictions. The Standing Committee on Public Administration recommended a two-year trial. The minister and the game and feral animal control advisory board would not need to approve new lands or species. They will have the power to control how the program is rolled out across the state. If the legislation is found to be ineffective, it can always be rolled back and limited in scope if need be. But I suspect opposition to this bill has less to do with community safety and perhaps more to do with the general opposition to hunting, which is sad. It is sad to see those kinds of attitudes in a state, especially one as large as ours, in which hunting plays such an important role in conservation. Of course, we recognise that some people have a right to hunt, fish and cultivate their own land. We recognise this right for Indigenous Australians. I find it strange that people can have two points of view at the same time—that it is somehow okay for Indigenous Australians to hunt and fish on their own land, but it is wrong for non-Indigenous Australians to hunt or fish on their own land. They must suffer from a serious case of cognitive dissonance. It makes no sense and it is an inconsistent view to hold.

I was listening to the Minister for Environment's remarks on this bill. He raised a concern about this legislation perhaps involving a new regime of red tape—too much red tape—and that it would be a bad thing to impose so much red tape on hunters wanting to engage and help in pest and feral animal control. It is an interesting view. If the Minister for Environment is suggesting that we should perhaps have a more laissez-faire approach to hunting on crown land, I would certainly like to sit down with him and have a discussion about what that might look like.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Member, would you take an interjection?

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Sure, please.

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: That is a fair comment. I can see the merit in that argument. My concern is that the current approach is opposed at almost every turn and is inconsistent. One of the findings of the committee in its twenty-third report was around the inconsistency of how our current pest control programs are administered.

Hon Stephen Dawson: That was current at that stage.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: That was current at that stage. I would be interested to hear how that has been addressed, minister. I do not get the opportunity to sit in on how these decisions are made, but I would be interested to hear how that might have been addressed so far. It would be useful to have a regime in place that allows for hunting on crown land in a pest and feral animal control capacity that can be expanded across the state, and to have a ready-made regulatory framework so that we do not have a patchwork approach between various government authorities and agencies. We need a regulatory regime in place that works, that everybody understands, that is consistent across the state, that is based on best practice from New South Wales and Victoria and that can be applied wherever it is needed to target certain species.

I will wrap up my comments now, Madam President. I am mindful of some amendments on the supplementary notice paper and I might foreshadow where I think they are going. The supplementary notice paper has some amendments around lead and lead ammunition. I am sure that we will hear from the member who gave notice of those amendments, but the intention seems to be to prevent lead contamination on crown land—in state forests and environmentally sensitive areas. Members are probably aware that most ammunition is made of lead, but I think that this might be overkill. I am not sure whether there is sound science to back it up. There is already naturally occurring lead in very small amounts in soil. I am not sure whether Hon Dr Steve Thomas, who is away on urgent parliamentary business, would back me up on this, but across Australia, lead occurs naturally in soil in about 15 to 40 parts per million. Consider a handful of tiny rounds, which are tiny, across hundreds of thousands of acres of bush. That is nowhere close to that level of contamination.

Hon Alison Xamon: You would need to refer to the research that led to that conclusion.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: I would be interested to hear that. I would be happy to see what the research is and adjust my position accordingly, if it is sound. If we are dealing with lead contamination around waterways, I think a case could be made, but that scenario would be more likely when people are duck hunting or bird hunting with lead shot in wetlands. We do not really have that in Western Australia, not on any large scale and not like in Victoria or in New South Wales, so I am not sure about the merit of an amendment like that. That being said, I am honestly not sure about the impact that it would have. Ammunition can be made from other metals if need be, but I would be interested to hear the science that backs up the proposed amendment perhaps when we get to the Committee of the Whole House or during the second reading debate.

Finally, the Minister for Environment raised a concern around, I think—I was in and out of the chamber on urgent parliamentary business—tourism and environmental tourism. He was concerned that if we were to allow hunting on crown land, it may have an impact on environmental tourism. In fact, that concern was raised in the minority report of the Standing Committee on Public Administration. Perhaps that factor needs to be considered when approvals are granted for the hunting of pests and control of feral animals on crown land, but I do not think it completely excludes the possibility of allowing hunting on crown land and in state forests. In fact, quite often hunting can act as a way of increasing tourism. I am aware of one case of a gentleman who owns or operates a remote station, who has people fly out to his station specifically for the purpose of firing large calibre rifles on a long range. It is a very specialised kind of sport shooting, in which large rifles are used in ranges of several hundred metres to a kilometre long. It can really be done only in large open spaces such as on a remote station. That actually is a tourist attraction. People fly out there specifically for that purpose, to engage in that sport. It is a completely legitimate sport. They just fire a bigger bullet. It is just as legitimate as any other sport such as archery, bowling or air rifle shooting. It is the same thing, but it has to be done in remote areas, so people fly out to do it. Like I say, that is a tourist attraction. I think that concerns about environmental tourism can be managed. However, it is worth keeping in mind that environmental tourism works only if we are able to conserve the natural environment. We are not able to do that when we have pests and feral animals wreaking havoc across the natural environment. We need to put in place policies, of course, for managing pest populations. Poisoning is one method, but other tools are available to us, and hunting is certainly one of them. Therefore, I do not think environmental tourism excludes the possibility of hunting on crown land like this bill proposes.

I certainly support this policy. It is commonsense legislation when it comes to hunting and firearms. I think the state would absolutely benefit from it.

HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral) [11.04 am]: I rise to make a contribution on the Game and Feral Animal Control Bill 2018. As members have been speaking this morning I am reminded of something that came to light to me when I was on the Standing Committee on Public Administration and I participated in the recreational hunting inquiry in the last Parliament; that is, when people approach the word “hunting”, they respond very emotionally and sensitively. I think that to a degree what Hon Rick Mazza is proposing in the Game and Feral Animal Control Bill can be loosely termed “hunting” and that that elicits a lot of emotive responses. But we are not actually talking about hunting in a commercial sense, or anything like that; we are talking about the potential to control, through game and feral animal legislation, the opportunity to build on environmental and biodiversity opportunities within the state. I often think that sometimes when we talk about this type of legislation, it gets taken over by words that are used emotively in debates against something like this coming into legislation.

I want to talk about my time as a member of the Standing Committee on Public Administration during that inquiry. I went into that inquiry with quite an open mind about the concept. Coming from a regional area, shooting feral animals is not foreign to me. I often did those activities as a child and young adult, and I still do go out on pastoral stations. Actually, it is a necessity in that environment. If a pastoralist wants to continue to graze on their lease that is undergoing conservation, they need to be able to control feral animals exactly as they control feral weeds. It is exactly the same process, and a regulatory system is needed to allow them to do it responsibly. There are no greater people who are responsible for the management of pests and feral animals on their property than farmers and

pastoralists, because it affects their bottom line directly. It is a pretty big motivation to want to have the government of the day support, through legislation, a process that allows them to do that legally.

There were three reasons why I, as a committee member, ultimately, supported the majority findings in the twenty-third report. One was around the tourism opportunities that were presented in a broader sense, but particularly for Aboriginal people through Indigenous land use agreements. The committee made some findings on the complex nature that Indigenous land use agreements can sometimes undertake, and some of the length of time it takes to negotiate them and also the cost of them. It is an opportunity for Aboriginal people to utilise their land and knowledge in combination with people who want to participate in that sort of activity.

I also thought it was an opportunity to utilise a resource, as Hon Aaron Stonehouse pointed out in his contribution, in the nature of utilising shooters of the Sporting Shooters' Association of Western Australia who already participate with the government in other programs. They are out there; they are professional, responsible people who hold a legitimate licence. The government could tap into that resource in many areas of the state, particularly in the Mining and Pastoral Region where feral animals are out of control and are affecting neighbouring properties, crops and stock. A response is required from the government. I thought during my time as a member of that committee, and I still do think, that this is a legitimate way for the government to tap into that great resource that sits out there. In Western Australia alone, the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia has over 10 000 members and more than 70 clubs. Nationally, the Sporting Shooters' Association has almost 200 000 members. As the minister alluded to, the Sporting Shooters' Association of Western Australia already participates in the Red Card for Rabbits and Foxes program, so there is already an awareness of that organisation by the government, and the people participating in those programs already know how to work with government through a licensed, legitimate program. Actually, all it would take is for the government to either expand the current program or licensing regime or legislate for larger game or feral animals. I thought that was a real opportunity for the government, with the end result being environmental outcomes and biodiversity management of our land, large amounts of which are crown land. The government has responsibility for the management of crown land. If a pastoralist cannot operate their lease or is not paying their rent and the property is taken off them by the Minister for Lands, in a lot of cases, the pastoral station will remain empty. No-one will be working it. The degradation that is caused to the land as a result of nobody carrying out any pest control management on those pastoral leases is really devastating, particularly to neighbouring pastoralists.

The third reason, then, that I, as a member of the committee, could support the majority report was the potential environmental and biodiversity outcomes. They were the reasons for me, as a member of the committee that undertook that inquiry. The evidence presented to the committee also was sound and made sense. In my mind, it was an entirely responsible and reasonable approach. Obviously, we need a regime that allows for the safety of the public to be maintained. That is a given. Also, there has to be a cost allocation—an appropriation—by the government. In one sense, taking advantage of this massive resource would save the government money in the long run. That is what governments should be about—long-term planning, particularly in an environmental and biodiversity sense. It entirely made sense to me.

I will turn to some of the committee's findings. The two reasons that the minister gave for the government not supporting the bill before the house are cost and safety. I want to bring the attention of the house to page 6 of the Standing Committee on Public Administration report, which contains a graph that provides an exceptionally clear history of the introduction of the Game and Feral Animal Control Act in New South Wales, which actually started life in 2002. The legislation has had some ups and downs, which the committee report notes, but any piece of legislation or licensing regime has probably gone through exactly the same process—it is reviewed, what works and what does not work are considered, and a new process is instigated. That is not unusual; it is something that the government undertakes every single day. I want to give a bit of history of the New South Wales legislation and the licensing regime there, as I think this would give the minister some clarity and confidence that these things can be managed. They have been managed in other states of Australia—from as early as 2002 in New South Wales, and I think Victoria has operated under aspects of that for a very long time as well. I go to page 4 of the committee's report, where it states —

- 2.5 The Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002 (NSW) was introduced by the then Minister for Agriculture, Hon Richard Amery, 'to manage and regulate the hunting of game; to establish a Game Council; and for other purposes'.
- 2.6 The Game Council was established in October 2002. It had responsibility for 'responsible and orderly hunting of game and pest animals', and its functions included 'representing the interests of hunters, administering a licensing system, enforcement of the Act, providing education services, and undertaking research'.

All those things are entirely legitimate. When operating a system like that, any responsible government should undertake those practices in carrying out the legislation. The report continues —

- 2.7 The Game Council was disbanded on 15 November 2013 following a report commissioned by the NSW Government and undertaken by Steve Dunn. Steve Dunn, a retired public servant, was asked to review the Game Council by Premier Barry O'Farrell in March 2013 after a Game Council staff member and a Game Council volunteer were alleged to be hunting illegally in a Game Council vehicle. The report criticised the governance of the Council. There were particular concerns relating to the appropriateness of having a 'regulatory agency to be representing the interests of hunters whom they also regulate'.

That is not an uncommon finding with boards and government regimes in which the regulator is also the regulatory agency. That happens in many areas. Rightly, the government made changes. The committee report also states —

... the report also stated that the Council had 'achieved significant results towards achieving its objects and functions'.

I note, as stated in the committee report, that Steve Dunn was later found to be corrupt in his dealings with Eddie Obeid, although those dealings were unrelated to his report. The committee report continues —

Following the Dunn report, responsibility for recreational hunting licences was transferred to the Department of Primary Industry ...

We visited the Department of Primary Industries in New South Wales as part of that committee inquiry. It has a very responsible licensing program that is operated in an exceptionally advanced manner, using GPS technology. It really does acknowledge the safety requirements that are needed, but it also operates a very secure safety system in that state. The report continues —

As a result, hunting in NSW state forests was suspended in July 2013. Following Forestry Corporation NSW's risk assessment report, completed in December 2013, hunting recommenced in February 2014 with stricter licensing conditions.

That is not a bad outcome. This regime still operates. At the time of the committee report, I thought that this practice and system was one that the Western Australian state government could adopt. I supported the trial because it would allow us to address some of the issues that were raised in the committee's findings. It would allow us to build on the lack of research and statistics that the Department of Parks and Wildlife, as it was at the time, presented in evidence to the committee. The minister also talked about finding 4 of the committee, which states —

... there is a lack of conclusive data on the effectiveness or otherwise of recreational hunting as a form of feral animal control. There is a reliance on either small scale scientific studies or anecdotal evidence or speculation to inform conclusions on both sides of the debate.

That formed the underpinning of the recommendation.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Public Administration, I believed that it deserved a trial for three reasons: the tourism benefit, particularly in an Aboriginal sense; the ability to utilise existing resources; and the potential environmental outcomes. There was always an opportunity for the government to look at what happened in the other states. It has certainly done that when drafting other pieces of legislation. This issue, particularly in an agricultural sense, warrants the government's time to look at introducing a trial. That would also address the second concern that the minister raised about cost. If the government introduced a trial, it would provide research and some understanding of what the costs would be to produce a regulatory system that would allow the government to tap into those opportunities that I have otherwise stated.

Before I conclude my comments today, at the time that the committee handed down its report and eagerly awaited the government response, the minister was Hon Albert Jacob. Members can find my comments in response to the government response in *Hansard*. I doubted whether the minister had even read the report. I recall saying that in the house at the time because his response—members can judge for themselves—sounded as though it was written by an adviser. It was very much a governmental response. It was very disappointing because it was a real missed opportunity.

I was very heartened to hear the Minister for Environment's response. The department has moved on and it is now named the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. Well, here is an attraction, minister, and an opportunity, and it is something that governments of all persuasions should look at. It is an opportunity that people can take advantage of and it definitely warrants being in the government limelight. I am glad that this issue has progressed. Members can read some of the departments' comments in the committee report. They were quite negative but that came from the space of this being something that was not familiar to them. When things are not familiar to people, their response is usually risk-averse. Really, the government needs to provide a policy that the department can work on. The departmental responses at the time of the committee inquiry did not surprise me because there was no government imprimatur to take it forward; it was risk-averse.

I support the bill. As the committee indicated, conducting a trial is commonsense. I look forward to the contributions of other members.

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [11.24 am]: I am conscious of the limited time available to me. I note that Hon Colin Tincknell and Hon Alison Xamon have indicated a desire to speak about the Game and Feral Animal Control Bill 2018. I will do my best, but I make no firm commitment on the brevity of my remarks, as befits an upper house member.

I will reflect on the very thoughtful manner in which Hon Rick Mazza has constructed this bill. I compliment him as a person of integrity who is obviously deeply committed to the prosecution of this on behalf of his constituents and stakeholders. It is a credit to this chamber, something which cannot be said of the other place, that at the very least it provides a panoply of views and an opportunity for not just the Labor Party or the Liberal Party to effectively give the cockeyed view of the political landscape, because it allows others to raise serious and important matters from a variety of perspectives. There is a lot to be said of the manner in which Hon Rick Mazza has prosecuted his argument. This bill is not a flippant, dangerous or derelict instrument in any respect; it is modelled on legislation that has existed in New South Wales since 2002. But we cannot look at bills in isolation from their context, and the context I want to reflect on is threefold.

I will reflect on the Minister for Environment's contribution. There is a commitment on behalf of this government to quite comprehensively expand the conservation estate in Western Australia by some five million hectares. That, of itself, as an ambitious stretch target probably has something to commend. However, what concerns me, as someone who is quite new in the environment portfolio, is whether the government, as it is currently resourced and constructed, is responsibly fulfilling its mandate to preserve and maintain the current conservation estate to the kind of ecological standard that is desirable and is geared towards the achievement of some sort of strategic environmental, economic and community outcome. I am concerned that that might not be the case. Even in Beverley, which is not far from Perth, people in the agricultural sector are having to deal with the incursion of emus in their canola fields, for example. We are not talking about feral or game animals; we are talking about emus and the interaction between what occurs on a conservation reserve or estate and the productive land use immediately adjacent to it.

I am concerned possibly about the brave new territory—with respect, Hon Rick Mazza—to which this takes us. I am a little concerned about the capacity of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions to manage its responsibilities in conjunction with its neighbours when dealing with status quo matters. The addition of this innovative approach to feral and game management probably raises some complications and challenges for government because it transfers to it a degree of responsibility that I do not think, at least at this very moment, it is capable of managing in a safe way. Did I say “cakable” or capable?

Hon Alison Xamon: No, you said capable.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I said capable. Sorry, I heard an interjection that suggested that I was not articulating clearly enough.

There is a lot in this bill that is of interest to the Liberal Party, but we are perhaps not at the threshold yet at which we could provide our support to the bill in the terms in which it is constructed. That is principally on public safety grounds, but also because of the capacity for enhanced biosecurity risk management, and I will get to that. I realise now, with five seconds left, that I am not going to give others the opportunity to speak, and for that I sincerely apologise.

Debate adjourned pursuant to standing orders.