

RECREATIONAL HUNTING SYSTEMS

Motion

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [3.47 pm] — by leave: Thank you, Madam Deputy President (Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson). I understand it is your first time in the chair today, so I apologise for throwing you something of a curve ball.

Earlier today, I gave notice of an amended form of this motion pursuant to Standing Order 61(a). As this item of business is now before the house, on the same day as I gave notice of the amended form of the motion, I understand that I am required to seek leave to move the motion in an amended form, pursuant to Standing Order 61(b). I move —

That the Council —

- (a) acknowledges the use in other states of regulated, licensed recreational hunting systems and the potential environmental contribution made in controlling pest animals on public lands, together with the possible economic, cultural and recreational benefits to the community; and
- (b) directs that —
 - (i) the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs inquire into the benefits or otherwise of a similar system being adopted in Western Australia and report back to the house by 26 June 2014; and
 - (ii) Hon Rick Mazza be co-opted as a member to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs for the purposes of the foregoing inquiry.

This motion may be controversial for some, and it may be difficult for some members to rationalise. However, I ask members to deploy their mental parachutes and keep an open mind. Conservation hunting on government land as a means of animal control in other states of Australia and in countries such as New Zealand, Canada and the United States has very successfully provided economic, cultural and environmental benefits. In fact, a booklet is produced on game hunting in Tasmania entitled *Game Tracks*, which contains a lot of information on hunting in that state and promotes Tasmania as a tourist destination for hunters. I visited Tasmania a couple of years ago to represent the Western Australian branch of the Australian Deer Association, which is a deer hunting organisation, at its national conference. At that conference there were representatives from government, including the Tasmanian minister responsible for parks and wildlife and senior bureaucrats. I was absolutely astounded by the attitude the government had to hunters in Tasmania. It was completely different from the experience in Western Australia. The government in that state engages hunters as a valuable resource to manage deer populations, which are a game animal in Tasmania. It has a quality deer management program to manage deer herds, which are considered a public resource. It was refreshing to hear senior bureaucrats talking to hunters about what they can do and the efforts they can make to save things like the Tasmanian devil and report back to them with information. Western Australia could follow that example and engage hunters more rather than looking at hunters in a different light.

Also, Victoria has a very established and mature system that produces a booklet entitled the *Victorian Hunting Guide for 2013*. In it, the minister's message states —

The Victorian Government encourages hunters to make the most of the state's outstanding game hunting opportunities. There are now about 43,000 people licensed to hunt game in Victoria, an increase of almost 46 per cent in the past decade

He goes on to state —

Victoria is the envy of game hunters in other states. To ensure hunting remains sustainable, safe and humane, the Wildlife (Game) Regulations were remade in September 2012. The regulations set hunting seasons, bag limits and hunting methods. The new regulations support responsible hunting while reducing red tape and unnecessary regulatory burden and keep pace with changing technology.

Those states certainly embrace hunters. I understand that Hon Stephen Dawson at one time worked for a government department in Victoria that was responsible for game hunting.

It was, in fact, hunters who initiated the conservation movement in America. Most armchair conservationists do not like to recognise that. In the late 1800s and early 1900s hunters in the USA were concerned about the diminishing number of game animals and their diminishing habitat. It was hunters who approached the government of the day and President Theodore Roosevelt, who was an avid hunter and conservationist, to establish fishing and game units in that country. Part of the entire charter and movement of the United States is that every dollar from hunting licences, taxes and excises must be returned to support conservation management

in that country. In fact, the moneys expended in 2011 resulted in the addition of \$87 million to the USA's national economy and supported 680 000 jobs nationally, so it is a very big industry in that country. Licences, stamp fees, excises and taxes directly contribute \$1.6 billion to the conservation movement. Hunters in that country are very proactive in developing conservation and ensuring that game numbers and the environment are looked after.

I read a brochure which was referred to by Hon Simon O'Brien and which was sent out recently by Field and Game Australia. I think all members got a copy of that brochure. I confess it was not initiated by me, because I do not have anything to do with Field and Game Australia, but I did read it with some interest. I note similar things are happening in Australia. In Victoria there is an area of wetlands called the Heart Morass, of which Field and Game Australia has purchased a large part—in fact, 1 930 acres and a further 2 647 acres, a fairly large chunk of land. Field and Game Australia has been redeveloping and recovering that wetland, and providing nesting boxes for birds. Field and Game Australia is a waterfowl hunting organisation and it not only takes from the environment but also gives back to ensure that numbers of birds remain in that state. Field and Game Australia says of the Heart Morass in one of its publications —

The loyal group of hunters have taken a degraded wetland and turned it into something that showcases hunters as conservationists and environmentalists to the broader community.

Works have included revegetation, fencing, water quality management, track maintenance, flora and fauna monitoring, and pest plant and animal control, and the results speak for themselves. There's been a significant change in the water quality and vegetation at the Morass, and with improved water quality comes a significant increase in vegetation in and around the wetland. Pest plant and animal control is ongoing, particularly in the new purchase area, and there will also be revegetation work to continue

A lot of that work is done by young families and people who volunteer their time on weekends. Hunters certainly contribute to the environment in a big way.

I appreciate that hunting can be controversial, but in reality conservation hunters have done a considerable amount to save Australia's endangered species. Members will be aware that hunting is sometimes referred to in a derogatory way, but it is a little bit like fishing, crabbing and those sorts of activities; it is an instinctive activity. Recently, quite a few hunters have done a lot of work in Western Australia on the red fox program. Each autumn teams of volunteer hunters go out to the wheatbelt to destroy foxes, and around 3 000 to 5 000 foxes are taken. That is a significant environmental benefit when one realises that foxes eat about a wheelie bin of wildlife a year.

There is another conservation benefit of hunters. WA in particular has many destructive feral pests. Most people live in the south west corner and do not see a lot of what goes on. WA is about four times the size of Texas and has many large vertebrate pests, such as donkeys, feral camels, goats, pigs, wild dogs—on which Hon Ken Baston has taken out a bounty to reduce their numbers and which can be very destructive—and the usual suspects of foxes and cats. Of course a lot of those feral animals are located in remote areas and it is very expensive for the state government to deal with them. About 10 years ago, New South Wales was similar to Western Australia in its attitude towards hunting, but in about 2006 the New South Wales Game Council was established, from memory, under the Game and Feral Animal Control Act. It meant that hunters could be licensed to hunt in state forest in an effort to reduce feral animals. Some of its financial benefits are quite staggering. In the second reading speech in the New South Wales Parliament on the Game Bill, it was stated —

I am sure that most honourable members of this House would be aware of the capacity of pest animals to cause significant losses to agricultural production, and also of the threat pest animals pose to native plants and animals. Most members would also be familiar with the killing and maiming of lambs and adult sheep by feral pigs, dogs and foxes.

New South Wales recognised that there was a big problem with feral animals. The overall direct economic impact of pest animals has been conservatively estimated at \$740 million annually in New South Wales. Pest animals threatened 40 per cent of New South Wales' fragile biodiversity. In 2010–11, New South Wales reported that 18 485 game and feral animals were removed from public land by conservation hunters, which equated to an estimated opportunity saving of \$2.4 million. The "Public Benefit Assessment 2011–12", which was independently prepared by AEC Group Ltd for the NSW Game Council, revealed that game hunting licence holders spent \$76.2 million on conservation hunting and an estimated 74 per cent of that—\$56.5 million—was invested in regional areas. It now creates 1 370 jobs, and 1 020 of those jobs are in regional areas of New South Wales.

Members can see the significant benefits in having a system of licence-regulated hunting and that there would be great benefit to the community, particularly rural and regional Western Australia, in adopting this sort of method. The commercial cost to remove wild dogs is \$5 000 a head. It is \$500 a head for wild deer; \$300 a head for feral

pigs; \$100 a head for feral foxes, goats and cats; and \$10 a head for rabbits. That is where the figure of \$2.4 million came from in New South Wales.

I asked a question on notice not long ago to find out how much it costs to commercially remove pest animals from our environment. I have not yet received an answer. It would be very interesting to see what it costs our state government per animal to remove feral pests from the environment.

The Victorian government estimates that game hunting in that state currently generates \$100 million a year in economic activity. That is a significant sum of money. It is something that this state really cannot turn a blind eye to. The cost of managing feral pests in this state, as in other states, is enormous. I fear that authorities are battling.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.