



13 March 2014

Committee Clerk
Public Administration Committee
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Perth WA 6000



Dear Sir or Madam,

Inquiry into the potential environmental contribution of recreational hunting systems¹

This is a submission by the Board of the BTF (Bibbulmun Track Foundation) to the Public Administration Committee in relation to this inquiry. I am the Chairman of the Board.

If further information is needed about this submission, please contact me.

I am prepared to appear before the Committee to explain and elaborate on this submission.

BACKGROUND

The Bibbulmun Track

The history of the Bibbulmun Track begins in about 1972 but the present alignment is over 15 years old. The Track has become well known both locally and overseas. It is a track for walkers only and is WA's best known walking track. It is over 1000 km long and runs from Kalamunda to Albany along the Darling Range, through the forests of the south-west and along its coasts. Spaced along it are 49 campsites for walkers. Each campsite has tent sites and a three-sided shelter with one or more water tanks filled from the roof and a separate toilet.

The Track's name recognises the pre-European inhabitants of the area, the Bibbulmun, who for years walked in the area.

The Bibbulmun Track Foundation (BTF)

The BTF is an incorporated association whose main object is to support the Track. The BTF was formed about 13 years ago and has about 2 500 members. It works closely with DPAW (Department of Parks and Wildlife) which is primarily responsible for the Track.

¹ Abbreviations used in this submission—
BTF Bibbulmun Track Foundation (Inc.)
DPAW the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

Outdoor recreation

The BTF believes the Track and its public profile play a part in encouraging people to recreate outdoors by walking. The WA government, through the Department of Health and the Department of Sport and Recreation, also encourages people to walk and take other forms of exercise.

Walking is perhaps the simplest and most basic form of human exercise.

Bush walking, including on the Track, is a widespread recreation. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' report *Participation in Sport and Physical Recreation, Australia, 2011-12 – Western Australia* says—

- An estimated 37 900 West Australians went bushwalking
- Out of 55 specific sports and recreation activities, bushwalking is the 10th most popular activity for women. (Walking is the most popular for both males and females).

People bush walk on their own, in self- or commercially-arranged groups, and in sporting events such as orienteering events and rogaines run by clubs. Many people bush walk on established trails and tracks but some do not, preferring to follow a route of their own off tracks and trails.

Bush walkers sometimes stay overnight in the bush, in shelters or in tents, either at designated campsites or at an opportune place (sometimes called 'wild camping').

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee's terms of reference are relevantly—

That the Council—

(a) acknowledges the use in other States of regulated, licensed recreation 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 Public Administration Committee inquire into the benefits or otherwise of a similar system being adopted in Western Australia and report back to the House by 4 December 2014; and ...

SUBMISSION

Most of the Bibbulmun Track is on public land; i.e. land to which the public has access. The public land is mostly land to which the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* applies, such as State forests, national parks, conservation parks and nature reserves², and so is land that is under the control and management of DPAW.

The BTF believes and submits—

- People already do hunt feral animals (i.e. non-indigenous animals) on public land and have done so for some time. This is illegal without some lawful authority, such as a permit³. It is unknown to what extent people are currently permitted to hunt.
- Currently, people seem to hunt mostly feral pigs and use vehicles and dogs and possibly guns to do so.

² See *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* s 5.

³ See *Conservation and Land Management Regulations 2002* r 18.

- Walkers on the Bibbulmun Track have felt intimidated and frightened by hunters with dogs and vehicles; especially at night at the established campsites where there are only three-sided shelters for protection and no lighting other than personal torches.
- Walkers on the Bibbulmun Track have reported hunters have caused them to have bad or negative experiences on the Track.
- Walkers and hunters tend to have different and sometimes conflicting values. Walkers often value the environment and quiet and peaceful recreation and like to have a low impact on the environment⁴. Those values conflict significantly with the values and culture of hunters. That conflict can lead to volatile situations which are unpleasant and spoil the experience for walkers.
- It is unclear to what extent, if any, current hunting practices have reduced the number of feral pigs on public land, or in any way controlled the number, in the long term.
- Some people, illegally⁵, release domestically bred piglets into the wild on public land to maintain a stock of feral pigs for people to hunt.
- Although DPAW employs people to trap and kill feral pigs on the public land it is responsible for, it is unclear to what extent that has reduced the number of feral pigs in the long term.
- If the number of feral pigs is boosted by people releasing domestically bred piglets into the wild on public land, DPAW might be fighting a losing battle to reduce the number.
- DPAW does not have the resources to adequately police the vast area of public land it is responsible for. So the probability of people being caught, let alone prosecuted, for doing something illegal on that public land is low.
- Animals, including hunting dogs and feral pigs, and some people do not recognize imaginary lines drawn by people, such as boundaries to parks or exclusion zones.

The BTF has these concerns about any proposal for a scheme of regulated, licensed hunting on public land—

- The safety of people walking on the Bibbulmun Track (or anywhere else on public land) would be endangered to a greater extent due to a greater number of hunters (legal under the scheme and illegal).
- Even if there were buffer zones or exclusion zones on each side of the Bibbulmun Track (or other tracks and trails open to the public), the safety of walkers would be endangered by hunters if the hunters do not have good navigational skills to know exactly where they are at all times. Moreover, such zones would not prevent feral animals being hunted, or animals hunting feral animals, from affecting walkers.
- There would be a greater likelihood of people having a bad experience when walking on the Bibbulmun Track (or anywhere else on public land) due to a greater number of hunters (legal and illegal).

⁴ The BTF advocates following the Leave No Trace principles.

⁵ See *Conservation and Land Management Regulations 2002* r 16.

- If the scheme were implemented, walkers would have to be warned of the risks and advised of the precautions to take to avoid being injured or killed as walkers are on the parts of the Appalachian Trail where hunting is permitted. Consequences of that are—
 - People might well decide not to walk on tracks like the Bibbulmun Track due to the risk or due to the precautions they would have to take.
 - Walking with the nagging thought that one could be injured or killed by a hunter (even if one is dressed in bright clothes and taking the suggested precautions) would significantly reduce the enjoyment of walking on tracks like the Bibbulmun Track.
- While the scheme might mean the people who are licensed are only those who are fit proper to be licensed and have the necessary skills including geographical ones such as map reading, the scheme would not reduce the number of people who hunt illegally, unless DPAW is better resourced to enforce the law.
- If unscrupulous people continue to release domestically bred piglets into the wild on public land, it is very unlikely hunting of any kind (legal or illegal), would reduce the number of feral pigs on public land.
- The scheme could well induce a demand for feral animals to hunt; a demand that might be met by unscrupulous people who know there is little chance of being caught.

Conclusion

In light of the above and the terms of reference, the BTF—

- Opposes any scheme of regulated, licensed hunting on public land; especially on public land used by walkers, whether on the Bibbulmun Track or elsewhere.
- Doubts whether such a scheme would make any environmental contribution to controlling pest animals on public land.
- Submits that such a scheme would have negative and adverse effects on the use of public land for recreational activities such as walking.
- Submits that the control of feral animals on public land should be left to WA government agencies which, in some cases, might elect to employ or contract suitable people to hunt and kill the animals.

The BTF hopes this submission is of assistance to the Committee.

Yours faithfully,



Mike Wood

Chairman of the Board of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation
on behalf of the Board of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation

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