



28 March 2014

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Committee Clerk  
Public Administration Committee  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
GPO Box A11  
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**Standing Committee on Public Administration ‘Inquiry into the potential environmental contribution of recreational hunting systems’**

The Wildflower Society of Western Australia (Inc.) is a non-profit community organisation that was established in 1958 for the purpose of encouraging the conservation and preservation of Western Australia’s unique flora. The organisation’s member base currently stands at over 700 members.

The Society would like to thank you for this opportunity to provide comment on the *Inquiry into the potential environmental contribution of recreational hunting systems*. The inquiry presents an opportunity to review and assess the potential for recreational hunting systems to be used for the control of pest animals on public lands in Western Australia. The Society supports the inquiry and welcomes the initiative.

The Society acknowledges that vertebrate pests including rabbits, wild pigs, feral cats, feral horses, feral goats and donkeys cause significant destruction to native vegetation and flora within Western Australia. Wild pigs in particular are a major threat to flora diversity. Wild pigs will root, dig up and eat threatened plant communities, erode soil, foul water sources and spread weeds and dieback. The Society understands that professional shooting is currently employed as one of a variety of control methods to reduce the impact of these vertebrate pests.

The Society supports the use of ***carefully controlled professional programs*** to control vertebrate pests. **The Society does not support amateur recreational hunting on public and private lands to control vertebrate pests.** There are a number of important and valid reasons in support of this argument. These reasons are listed in Table 1.

It is evident that effective control of vertebrate pests can only be delivered through strategic programs that use a range of control methods, depending on the target species. Ad hoc recreational shooting in national parks and on other lands will cause even greater loss of biodiversity through the following:

- The shooting of native species;
- Introduction of new feral animal populations to create more hunting opportunities;
- Dispersal of feral animals into previously unaffected areas;
- Driving of vehicles and traversing of shooters through environmentally sensitive areas;
- Spread of dieback and weeds (especially in south west WA) as a result of increased soil disturbance; and
- Disturbance to ecosystem balance (related to loss of dingoes).

In addition to further reducing biodiversity, amateur recreational shooting presents a risk to the safety of national park and reserve visitors, rangers and private property owners. People visit national parks and reserves for the peace and tranquility they offer. They are one of the few places where people can visit to escape the noise, rush and stress of everyday life. The sound of guns firing and the fear of coming into close firing range of a gun will spoil the amenity of public and private lands and create an unnecessary stress to native fauna.

**In summary, the Society can under no circumstances support the control of vertebrate pests by amateur recreational hunting on public and private lands given the negative impacts associated with its implementation.**

Yours sincerely



Dr Eddy Wajon  
President  
Wildflower Society Western Australia (Inc.)

**Table 1. Reasons in Favour of Rejecting Recreational Hunting in Public Lands to Control Pest Animals**

Reason	Evidence
<p><b>Recreational hunting does not control vertebrate pests</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For a control program to reduce vertebrate pest populations it needs to achieve a high annual rate of animals killed to exceed their natural rate of increase. For this reason professional shooters are usually assigned to undertake aerial culls of pest populations. Evidence has shown that aerial culls are more effective than on ground recreational hunting. For example in a 2002 trial, 65 recreational hunters used over four days resulted in 44 deer (18 female) shot. In contrast, a four-hour helicopter cull in the same area in 2007 using one shooter resulted in 182 deer shot, estimated to be more than 90 per cent of the population (ISC 2009);</li> <li>• Research by the Invasive Species Council, shows that recreational ground hunting usually does not provide effective feral animal control and creates a serious risk of worsening feral animal problems. This is because amateur recreational hunters are unable to kill feral animals in significant enough numbers to exceed the natural rate of increase and ad hoc hunting can disperse feral animals into new areas, making the problem worse (ISC 2009);</li> <li>• The Department of Agriculture and Food (DAF) (WA) reports that baiting using 1080 (sodium fluoroacetate) is the most effective option for controlling feral pigs. Control using shooting and trapping can be carried out, but shooting only removes a small proportion and can disperse the pigs (DAF 2014);</li> <li>• In 2012 the NSW Government’s national parks hunting bill was introduced. The Public Service Association (PSA) of NSW surveyed 292 rangers and parks staff employed in national parks in NSW. 93.4% of respondents did not believe recreational hunting could help control feral pests in national parks. One respondent stated “Recreational hunting has been taking place for over 150+ years for rabbits and foxes and they are still not under control. Victorian parks have (been) hunting for 20 years and they are shooting more ferals than when they started. Its a well known practice that hunters like to manage the animals that they like to shoot - they don’t want to remove their recreational activity” (PSA 2012).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hunters have historically shown an inability to avoid killing native and protected species</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duck shooting was banned in WA followed by several other states due to the inability of hunters to avoid shooting native and threatened species (despite being educated on identification);</li> <li>• On 16 March 1994 Dr David Baker-Gabb, Director, Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union stated “Hunters have demonstrated time and again that collectively they cannot be relied on to correctly identify threatened waterfowl, despite the best efforts of CNR (Victoria) to educate them. Therefore waters containing threatened waterfowl such as Freckled Duck and Blue-billed Ducks must be closed to shooting”; and</li> <li>• On 3 September 1990 Dr Carmen Lawrence, Former Premier of Western Australia stated “There is widespread opposition throughout the community to the cruelty and environmental damage caused by shooters... Evidence from previous [WA] seasons shows that injured ducks have been left to die, protected species have been shot, and fragile wetlands have been polluted by lead and cartridges. Our community has reached a stage of enlightenment where it can no longer accept the institutionalised killing of native birds for recreation”.</li> </ul>

Reason	Evidence
<b>Introduces new populations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There has been evidence of recreational hunters introducing new feral animal populations to create hunting opportunities. In 2007, genetic analysis by Murdoch University showed that pregnant sows had been dumped in pristine areas of forest near Northcliffe, Western Australia, so hunters could return and shoot offspring (ABC 2007).</li> <li>• Researchers have found that “more than half the 218 feral deer herds in Australia identified in 2000 appear to have been derived from illegally translocated deer, presumably to create more hunting opportunities (there is no other likely explanation)” (Moriarty, 2004).</li> </ul>
<b>Poses a significant risk to park users and private property</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the PSA survey of 292 NSW rangers and parks staff 15% of respondents noticed an increase in illegal shooting or hunting in National Parks since the NSW Government’s National Parks hunting bill was introduced. One respondent stated “We get calls from frustrated neighbouring property owners because they've had stock killed or people shooting onto their property and no-one is recording their complaints or taking them seriously. The people supervising the shooting need to understand the local landscape and have a relationship with neighbouring landholders” (PSA 2012).</li> <li>• In the PSA survey rangers and park staff noticed a number of issues that coincided with the introduction of the hunting bill including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Bullet holes in signs and picnic areas”;</li> <li>○ “Recently our pest monitoring cameras detected a person walking through the park with a gun”;</li> <li>○ “I regularly receive reports of gunshots within parks (including at picnic areas) out of hours;</li> <li>○ “Shots fired in close proximity to me in Budawang National park, causing me to run for it”</li> <li>○ “I have personally come across people illegally hunting in parks on more than one occasion, including a group of seven people with dogs and weapons”</li> <li>○ “Hunters had "strayed" from the adjoining State Forest into the park. Did not observe damage or injury, but felt distinctly unsafe while walking in a park with gunfire an unknown distance away” and;</li> <li>○ “Reports from scared members of the public about gun shot noises and public that have stumbled across hunters armed with Crossbows”.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Escaped pig hunting dogs are a serious concern for sheep farmers and a risk to the public, as was evident in comments made in response to a newspaper story about wild dog problems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “The biggest problem we face are the dogs which are either abandoned or lost by pig hunters. These dogs are bred for aggression. This is a huge problem with many pig shooters’ dogs going missing and in the next year huge wild dogs appearing. People no longer bush walk in our area in fear of coming across a lost, hungry and aggressive, pitbull wolfhound cross” (ISC 2009).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Reason	Evidence
<p><b>Poses a significant risk to the native fauna</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rangers and park staff in the PSA survey noted the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Shooting of kangaroos, emus, koalas and wombats with carcasses left behind”;</li> <li>○ “An increase of animals shot with arrows”;</li> <li>○ “Many lost pig dogs that then go wild; many instances of native animals, such as wallabies and wombats being killed by pig hunting dogs”;</li> <li>○ “We have come across mobs of kangaroos shot by guns and crossbows” (PSA 2012); and</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In WA in Bush Forever Site 342 (Anstey Keane Damplands) we had received complaints of kangaroos being shot and indeed this occurred on the morning that we held a guided walk in this reserve on 30 September 2013.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reduces the amenity of national parks and conservation areas</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rangers and park staff in the PSA survey noted the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Gates forced and damaged, fences and locks cut”;</li> <li>○ “Landholders and rangers intimidated, threatened with violence”;</li> <li>○ “Vehicles driven into sensitive environments, in addition to new trails being created”;</li> <li>○ “Rubbish and spent ammunition dumped, fires left burning”;</li> <li>○ “Bowhunting of deer, with the (deer) carcass strung from a tree next to a walking track”;</li> <li>○ “Dead dogs hung up in trees”;</li> <li>○ “Pig hunters racing through wilderness with dogs in areas not set aside, running over tents with people in them”;</li> </ul> </li> <li>and</li> <li>○ “Ammunition and shells left behind. Headless deer corpse left in family picnic areas”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Spreads dieback and weeds</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreational hunters are more likely to veer off formal tracks in pursuit of a hunt and hence are more likely to spread Dieback and weeds into previously uninfected areas;</li> <li>• The use of dogs for hunting of pigs is also likely to increase the spread of Dieback and weeds over large areas; and</li> <li>• Native vegetation within the south west of WA is particularly susceptible to Dieback and recreational shooting and hunting increases the risk of Dieback being spread.</li> </ul>

Reason	Evidence
<b>Creates ecosystem imbalance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="645 252 2139 421">• A large body of research now indicates that removing dingoes from ecosystems increases threats to biodiversity. The removal of dingoes results in an increase in the abundances and impacts of herbivores and invasive mesopredators, most notably the red fox <i>Vulpes vulpes</i>. The loss of dingoes has been linked to widespread losses of small and medium-sized native mammals, the depletion of plant biomass due to the effects of irrupting herbivore populations and increased predation rates by red foxes (Glen et al. 2007, Wallach et al. 2010, Johnson et al. 2007, Letnic et al. 2012);</li> <li data-bbox="645 421 2139 545">• There is an opportunity to use a variety of control methods for dingo populations that aim to balance the needs of agriculture while improving biodiversity conservation. Such methods include dingo proof fencing, buffer zones or the use of shepherds or shepherd dogs (Wagner, Schmidt &amp; Conover, 1997; Andelt et al., 1999; O'Neill, 2002; Dickman et al., 2009). Ad hoc shooting of dingoes by amateur shooters is not considered a sustainable method to control dingo populations.</li> </ul>

## References

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