

SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REGARDING RECREATIONAL HUNTING IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Introduction

In December 2013, the parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Administration invited submissions regarding the future of recreational hunting in Western Australia (Inquiry into the potential environmental contribution of recreational hunting systems). Shooters Union Western Australia (SUWA) welcomes the opportunity to participate as part of the Committee's review process.

Background

Western Australia has a long tradition of recreational hunting with organised activities being recorded as early as 1833.¹ Over the subsequent 180 years however, beginning in 1874 with the passing of the *Game Act*² and culminating in a complete ban on the taking of fowl in 1990³, the sport has become severely restricted. In all but a handful of situations where amateur culling is undertaken on state managed land at the behest of government agencies, recreational hunting is only open to licensees who have written permission to take feral species on private property.⁴ The situation puts WA at odds with the majority of Australian jurisdictions where hunting on public land is lawful under managed licensing systems which contribute greatly to the control of feral pests and their impact on native wildlife and the environment generally. The following considers three of the various systems in place.

¹ Bourke, M. (1987). *On the Swan: A History of the Swan District, Western Australia*. Nedlands: University of Western Australia, p. 114.

² *Western Australian Parliamentary Debates, Volume 3*.

³ *Western Australia Wildlife Conservation Act 1950 - Section 15A*.

⁴ *Western Australia Firearms Act 1973 - Section 11A (c)*.

Alternative Models

New South Wales –

“Pest animals such as foxes, rabbits and feral goats and pigs can have significant impacts on agricultural production, the environment and communities. Hunting is recognised as one of a number of tools used in the management of pests and also as a legitimate recreational pursuit. The Game Licensing Unit manages hunter licensing, education, regulation and compliance, and the administration of hunting on public land in NSW.”⁵

Game and feral animal hunting in NSW is subject to regulations to ensure the safety of all public land users with 196 state forests currently available to recreational shooters. The conditions which apply to hunting in NSW are set out in the state’s *Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002* and the *Game and Feral Animal Control Regulations 2012*. The NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) is responsible for enforcing compliance and additional requirements apply depending on whether or not one is hunting on public or private property. Hunters are required to hold a valid license if they are hunting on public land, or if they are hunting deer or other game species on private land.

Hunters must carry their license with them at all times whilst hunting. A valid NSW game hunting license must be produced when requested by an authorized inspector, a NSW Police officer or land owner. A hunter must have permission to hunt from the owner or manager of the land they are on. In the case of public land the DPI is able to grant written permission to hunters on behalf of other land managers.

Holders of a NSW restricted game hunting license (R-license) are eligible to hunt on specified public lands with written permission obtained through the DPI’s Game Licensing Unit. In order to qualify for an R-license, an applicant must become a member of an Approved Hunting Organisation (AHO) and their membership must remain valid. There are close to 300 AHOs registered in NSW.

In order to hunt on public land, holders of R-licenses must seek permission from the DPI in advance. After making a booking, one clear day must pass before the permission becomes valid – i.e. if one applies for permission at midday on Tuesday, one can legally hunt as of Thursday. Bookings are made online.

Victoria –

“Game hunting in Victoria continues to grow in popularity with 46,000 licensed game hunters now making the most of our world-class hunting opportunities. With this increase in activity comes the obligation to not only comply with the law, but to behave responsibly to protect our valuable resources and the reputation of hunters.”⁶

Once an applicant has passed a series of game-specific tests administered by the Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI). The follow regime applies:

⁵ Retrieved January 21, 2014, from <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/hunting>

⁶ Retrieved March 24, 2014, from <http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/fishing-and-hunting/game-hunting/game-hunting-regulation/publications/welcome-to-the-2014-victorian-hunting-guide>

State forest, forest parks and other unoccupied Crown land - Game species may be hunted during open seasons. Pest animals may be hunted at any time.

Licensed Crown land - Generally, game species (during open seasons) and pest animals (at any time) may be taken, subject to the permission of the licensee.

State game reserves - Game duck may be hunted, but only during open seasons. 16 State Game Reserves are available for Stubble Quail hunting and six for Hog Deer hunting. Pest animals may not be hunted at any time, unless specifically authorized by DEPI or Parks Victoria.

Private land – Game species (during open seasons) and pest animals may be hunted, but only with the permission of the landowner/manager.

Sanctuaries - Game species may not be hunted at any time. Pest animals may be hunted.

National parks, state parks, coastal parks, wilderness parks, regional parks - Generally, hunting of any type is not permitted at any time, but there are some exceptions.

Melbourne water catchment areas - Hunting of any type is not permitted at any time.

Flora and fauna reserves and nature conservation reserves - Hunting of any type is not permitted at any time.

Alpine resorts - Hunting of any type is not permitted at any time.

Tasmania –

Any person wishing to take deer, wild duck, mutton-bird, wallaby, brown quail or pheasant during the gazetted open seasons requires a licence. Game licences are for recreational hunting within prescribed seasons.

All persons aged eighteen years and older who wish to take deer, duck, wallaby, brown quail and pheasant will require a current firearms licence. Current firearm licences issued from all Australian states or territories will be accepted.

If an applicant is purchasing a game licence for deer then the Tasmanian Minor permit or firearm licence must have a Category B endorsement.

Introduced pest animals that may be hunted –

Rabbits are classified as vermin under the *Vermin Control Act 2000* and may be hunted at any time on Crown land, state forest and on private land with the permission of the landowner. There is no bag limit and rabbits are normally taken with shotguns and rimfire rifles, although any non-prohibited firearm may be used.

Hares, while not classified as vermin, have no legal status and can be hunted under the same conditions that apply for rabbits.

Foxes are classified as vermin under the *Vermin Control Act 2000* and may be hunted at any time on Crown land, state forest and on private land with the permission of the landowner.

Waterfowl Identification Test Certificate (WIT) - Game licence applicants purchasing a Wild Duck licence for the first time must produce their Waterfowl Identification Test Certificate to obtain a game licence for Wild Duck. Applicants born in the year 1935 or prior to 1935 are exempt from this test.⁷

Summary


SUWA believes that the current hunting restrictions in place in WA involving state controlled land are completely out of step with the situation in most other Australian jurisdictions; where well managed programs provide a significant ecological benefit and a substantial fiscal boost to rural communities.

SUWA advocates a management system in Western Australia where if a licensee furnishes proof of having completed a training regime via organisations such as *Conservation Australia Inc.*, said proof should be considered as meeting the 'genuine reason/need' criteria set down under sections 11A (c) and 11B of the *Firearms Act 1973*, and that certified recreational hunters should be granted unimpeded access to approved state forests and Crown land in order to cull feral pests, including introduced fowl species.

SUWA supports the inclusion of an amendment within section 6 (2) of the *Firearms Regulations 1974* to recognise 'Certified Recreational Hunting' in order to facilitate the above.

The SUWA is grateful for the opportunity to participate in the review process and trusts the Committee will give serious consideration to the Union's proposals.

Yours respectfully,



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⁷ Retrieved March 24, 2014, from <http://dpipwe.tas.gov.au/>