



The Chairperson,
Public Administration Committee
Legislative Council

SUBJECT: INQUIRY INTO THE POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONTRIBUTION OF RECREATIONAL HUNTING SYSTEMS

Terms of reference (a):

As a firearm owner and hunter both in NSW and WA (WA over the past 44 years) and in NSW for 20 years I have experienced both jurisdictional systems in respect to firearm possession and recreational hunting.

From NSW which had up until 1996 system of licensing hunters not their firearms but before that a system where the only licence that was required to possess a firearm was for the use of concealable weapons and they could only be used in general on ranges or security matters.

In WA the possession and use for professional or recreational use of firearms has always been difficult and oppressive with genuine applicants for a firearm always considered guilty until proven innocent or genuine, nothing much has changed since I moved to WA permanently in 1970 apart from the draconian repossession of legally owned firearms in 1996.

Apart from a new look and a rewrite of the Firearms Act and Regulations being long overdue but not the subject of this inquiry, the hunting of animals on public land would seem a logical step in the control of feral vertebrates both on private and public land where a combined community response would be helpful.

The control of feral animals by recreational hunters has always been supported under sufferance by WAPOL although hunters do and can play a very constructed role in vertebrate control when supported and allowed to do so. The current restrictive or draconian system of firearm licensing in WA does little to assist with feral vertebrate control by non land owners.

Control of feral vertebrates by recreational hunters will only ever be but one strategy (although an important one) in feral animal control which has been suppressed by successive govt's but non more than in WA. With the proper training and authorisation of hunters to hunt on what is Crown Land (UCL) and other reserves this inquiry should also be looking at the controlled harvesting of native species on a sustainable basis as happens in some other jurisdictions.

The recreational benefits to hunters and their family on their ability to hunt and enjoy the wider outdoors would seem to have significant emotional and cultural benefits to a wide section of the community who enjoy although in a limited fashion the harvesting of feral animals.

Although there are some direct economical benefits to hunters and their families from providing food for the home table this requires further investigation as to what other benefits this experience adds to the physiological and cultural well being of those who engage in this health activity.

A hunters association with land is not limited to Aboriginal people and any person who has hunted all their life will confirm a life long association and genuine care for the land they have hunted on which seems to have gone unnoticed by some within society. As Australia is a multicultural mix of many races who have hunted in their country of origin and have over decades developed a strong cultural association with hunting, when they immigrate to Australia they should be able to continue their cultural activity without the obstacles often placed in their way by overly and unnecessary restrictive firearm laws and restrictive access to hunting on Crown Land which as citizens of WA we should be able to hunt on.

Ask any genuine hunter as to their views on the need to protect the environment from degradation in all its forms and you will find many a staunch conservationists who are prepared to contribute time and money to ensure sustainability of the species they hunt.

The economic benefits to small but remote towns and communities where hunting is permitted in other jurisdictions is often underrated and should be assessed on the same basis as the benefits of recreational fishing. Although hunting can have some savings to govt where feral animals are required to be controlled this should not be the sole driver or determinant of change.

Recreational hunting and the benefits this healthy outdoor activity provides to those who currently engage in this activity and those with a change in govt policy may also have the opportunity to participate in this activity is to be encouraged. Hunting is an important ingredient to the social mix of our society and every effort should be made by govt to support its expansion by allowing hunting on Crown land.

For govt to miss this opportunity to engage more fully with hunters to assess as to what they can contribute to the not only the control of feral animals but the harvesting of native species as well as the social and mental well being of our society would be an opportunity lost.

I applaud the Hon Rick Mazza for raising this issue to be properly assessed by those fair minded members of the committee examining this important community issue.

Yours Sincerely

Geoff Harcombe