



Perth Bushwalkers Club (Inc)

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27 March 2014

Ms Lauren Mesiti - Committee Clerk

Standing Committee on Public Administration
Legislative Council
Parliament House
PERTH 6000

Mr David G. Osborne
President

Perth Bushwalkers Club (Inc)

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Attention: Ms Lauren Mesiti

Dear Ms Mesiti

Re : **Inquiry into recreational hunting systems in Western Australia**

Enclosed is Perth Bushwalkers Club (Inc) submission to the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

David Osborne

President
Perth Bushwalkers Club (Inc)

Submission to Standing Committee on Public Administration
Inquiry into recreational hunting systems in Western Australia
Submission by Perth Bushwalkers Club (Inc)

27 March 2014

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I. Reason for Perth Bushwalkers Club (Inc) interest in the Inquiry

Perth Bushwalkers Club (Inc) was established in 1969. Over its 45-year history it has remained Perth's most active bushwalking club, introducing many in the community to the wonderful opportunities in W.A. for the healthy recreational activity of bushwalking. The Club has a current very active membership of around 350 members.

It is in the strong interests of the community and our Club that opportunities for safe bushwalking on public lands are not threatened and/or reduced. We also have a very genuine concern that the environment we walk in is appropriately protected for this and future generations.

II. Perth Bushwalkers Club (Inc) position on regulated, licensed recreational hunting systems

Perth Bushwalkers Club (Inc) urges the Public Administration Committee to consider that a regulated, licensed recreational 'hunting system' is unsuitable for adoption in Western Australia.

The introduction of a recreational hunting system on public lands would be incompatible with the interests of the broader community, including our bushwalking members. Any recreational hunting within such public lands, whether regulated or not, is a clear threat to bushwalking as a safe recreational activity and also to other popular forms of passive recreation on public lands such as Orienteering, Rogaining and Geocaching.

We urge the Public Administration Committee to consider the following relevant factors in that regard:

1. **Bushwalking as a recreational activity in the community** – Bushwalking is a popular, often under-recognised recreational activity which continues to grow in its importance to the community as a recreational pursuit. The Annual Reports from the Australian Sports Commission’s Exercise, Recreation and Sport Surveys (“ERASS”) indicate participation in W.A. in the organized and non-organised recreation category of “Walking (bush)” increased by 30% over a five-year period from 50,200 persons in 2005 to 65,100 in 2010 (most recent report; see **ERASS Annual Report 2010, p.165, Table 113**).
2. **Bushwalking has significant value to the community** - Various past and present W.A. State Government recreational strategies for Western Australia (including the DSR’s **“W.A. Trails Strategy 2009-2015”**) have recognised the need to encourage all Western Australians to walk more and to develop environments in which the decision to walk is easier. Bushwalking offers clear health benefits. It is well documented that walking, particularly in the natural environment, is very good for people. Existing recreational and health strategies rightly reinforce the view that by far the best value for money in ‘health’ can be derived from ensuring people walk more. In that regard, bushwalking activities play an important role in the community.
3. **Dependence on continued safe access to public lands and the right to peaceful enjoyment** - The community’s ongoing bushwalking activities, including our own Club’s activities, are very dependent on continuing relatively unrestricted and safe access to public lands, not just National Parks, but also State Forests, including those close to Perth and more remote. The majority of the Club’s bushwalking activities involve ‘off-track’ cross-country walking through natural, forested areas which are almost invariably public lands versus private property. Our traditional off-track bushwalking has minimal environmental impact.

Our members and the general community should be entitled to continue their peaceful use and enjoyment of the natural environment on public lands for healthy recreation without the disturbing intrusion of hunters and the exposure to the risk of ‘accidents’ resulting from stray bullets and the like.

Recreational hunting certainly results in innocent people being killed, irrespective of “safeguards”. The question is not **whether** shooting fatalities will occur, but **how often**, if recreational hunting is introduced to public lands.

4. **National Parks** - Recreational hunting and shooting in National Parks is not only incompatible with bushwalking, it is also inconsistent with the purpose for which the Parks were established. Feral animal shooting in National Parks must be under the direct control of the responsible authorities, i.e. Department of Parks & Wildlife.
5. **Control of feral animals** – We acknowledge that shooting of feral animals may form a legitimate part of a broader strategy, alongside other forms of control including baiting, trapping and habitat (e.g. warren) removal. However, when included in such strategies, shooting should be a final, limited period, “clean-up” operation, designed to eliminate remnant populations. Conduct of such clean-up operations must be subject to the following minimum pre-conditions:
 - i. They must be organised, coordinated and controlled operations,
 - ii. There must be prior assessment by parks management et al of the risks to public safety, and
 - iii. Appropriate controls must be in place to minimise the likelihood of injury to participants and the public, including off-track bushwalkers.
 - iv. They must be followed by routine scientifically rigorous monitoring of the area to assess each operation’s effectiveness and to ensure the area remains free of the targeted feral species.

These operations need to be managed by the appropriate Government agencies. Control of feral animals should not depend in any manner, nor to any degree, upon licensed recreational hunting.

6. **Impact of regulation on passive recreation in W.A.** - Regulation has repeatedly moved, mostly unwittingly, in the direction of decreasing rather than increasing access to healthy bushwalking opportunities and other forms of passive recreation across large areas of our public lands, including some National Parks and State Forests. Regulation in support of recreational hunting systems would be a further disincentive and limitation on community participation in healthy bushwalking recreation on public lands.
7. **The unintended incentive for increased illegal release of feral animals** - W.A. has a history of illegal feral animal releases (especially pigs) onto public lands in W.A. for private hunting purposes. Regulations that permit and thus encourage recreational hunting will be an obvious incentive to those who seek to spread their hunting activities through illegal release of animals into new areas. The recreational hunter has no wish to see his/her target prey disappear as a result of control strategies. Consequently, recreational hunting is likely to achieve the opposite of the intended key impact. i.e. Pest animal distribution across public lands is most likely to increase through recreational hunting, and not be controlled as misguidedly hoped under a 'hunting system'.
8. **The potential benefits of regulated, licensed recreational 'hunting systems' are undemonstrated and dangerously speculative** - We urge the Committee to consider that the introduction of hunting systems in the States of Victoria and NSW is based on blinkered and reckless assumptions of potential environmental benefits, i.e. an overall positive (rather than negative) contribution to the control of pest animals on public lands. The "potential" benefits are unproven and the unintended negative consequences for the environment of introducing an inappropriate, flawed system would be severe.

The other supposed "possible" benefits to the community, including in particular the "economic" and "recreational" benefits, must also be carefully and objectively considered for their likely negative impacts and costs to the community. e.g.

- i. The expected increase in licensed firearm and ammunition purchases that would accompany increased recreational hunting is not an economic benefit that would be widely desired nor applauded by the community.
- ii. Increased opportunities for recreational hunting would have negative impacts on much more widely community-supported, passive recreational activities such as bushwalking, orienteering, regaining and geocaching. The great benefits of these latter activities in reducing the burden of health costs on the community must also be considered.

In view of the above, Perth Bushwalkers Club (Inc) strongly believes that a regulated, licensed recreational 'hunting system' is unsuitable for adoption in Western Australia.



David Osborne
President
Perth Bushwalkers Club (Inc)

27 March 2014