

# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

## **INQUIRY INTO THE POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONTRIBUTION OF RECREATIONAL HUNTING SYSTEMS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
WEDNESDAY, 13 AUGUST 2014**

### **SESSION ONE**

#### **Members**

**Hon Liz Behjat (Chairman)**  
**Hon Darren West (Deputy Chairman)**  
**Hon Nigel Hallett**  
**Hon Jacqui Boydell**  
**Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson**  
**Hon Rick Mazza (Co-opted member)**

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**Hearing commenced at 9.15 am****Mr RONALD BRYANT****President, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia WA Inc, sworn and examined:****Mr MATTHEW GODSON****Special Projects Officer, Pest and Wildlife Management, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, sworn and examined:**

**The CHAIRMAN:** Good morning. I am Liz Behjat, the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Administration and I welcome you here this morning. I would also like to welcome members of the public who are observing our hearing this morning. First, let me introduce the committee to you. On my left we have Hon Rick Mazza, a member for the Agricultural Region; Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson, a member for the East Metropolitan Region; and Hon Darren West, deputy chair of the committee and also from the Agricultural Region. I am from the North Metropolitan Region. On my right is Dr Julia Lawrinson, our advisory officer; Hon Nigel Hallett from the South West Region and Hon Jacqui Boydell from the Mining and Pastoral Region. So we think you have all of the important regions covered here in our committee. I need to run through some formalities so if you bear with me we will do that.

I welcome you to the meeting and I will ask you in turn to take either an oath or an affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

**The CHAIRMAN:** You will have signed a document entitled “Information for Witnesses”. Have you read and understood that document?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** These proceedings are being record by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It will assist the committee and Hansard if when you are speaking to us to please quote the full title of any document you refer to during the course of the hearing and just be aware of the microphones in front of you and try to speak into them. Ensure you do not cover them with papers or make noise near them and try to speak into them. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If, for some reason, you wish to make a confidential statement during today’s proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised it should not be made public. I advise you that publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript of evidence may constitute contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege. I also remind members in the public gallery that we do not allow photographs or other recordings to be taken of our proceedings while in session.

Is there an opening statement you would like to make or do you want us to just jump into the questions? Would you like to talk us through the document that you have just given us?

[9.20 am]

**Mr Godson:** I have provided some committee hearing notes to briefly summarise the main points within the submission. I will give you a bit of background on myself. I am tertiary-qualified in

biodiversity conservation and park management. I also have qualifications in urban and regional planning, and I am currently undertaking a masters in environmental science and management.

With these committee notes I have tried to outline some of the key points that we have placed in our submission regarding recreational hunting systems and this opportunity for Western Australia to maybe explore recreational hunting systems that can deliver environmental, economic and recreational and cultural benefits. There are certain expectations that we believe the community in general, which includes the shooting and hunting community, would require in a system, and those three key points are all about sensible regulations, having codes of practice attached to them, and educational programs. With that we can develop a recreational hunting system that is acceptable to the general community.

**The CHAIRMAN:** My first question, which you have just outlined, was going to be, “What do you consider to be the most essential aspects of a recreational hunting system?”

**Mr Godson:** Yes, certainly. I guess we can probably take questions and I can probably pull a lot of those answers out of the documents that I have just given you. The other key points are that there are a lot of issues surrounding recreational hunting, and a lot of them can be overcome quite easily through regulations and codes of practice.

**The CHAIRMAN:** As we know, recreational hunters are already involved in various activities throughout our Department of Parks and Wildlife in Western Australia, which I am sure you are familiar with, and they can also be engaged on private land with the landholder’s permission. What further benefits could be gained if there were a more general recreational hunting system put in place?

**Mr Bryant:** Probably the biggest one is the economic benefit. You need to look at other states and the flow on effect to local communities, like in places like Matlock up in the hills with the deer hunters, and Kerang with the duck shooters especially. The amount of money and volume that goes into that small community is phenomenal. In this state, probably one of the biggest ones would be the “Red Card for Rabbits and Foxes”, which I am sure some of you have heard of by now. It is amazing. I go to one south of town—just to keep it generic—and there would be at least 30 teams who roll up and put money into the local servo and the pub—I should not say “the pub” but it is true—for dinner and a drink of “coke” and “water”. The flow on money into that community is huge. On top of that, a team pays a few bucks to be a part of that little group, if you like, and half of that money goes into buying a new fire engine for the town or some basic stuff for the school. The community flow-on effect in terms of money is just phenomenal.

**The CHAIRMAN:** And that is already happening with hunters going onto private land, so why would we need to open it up to other areas then if it already has an economic benefit?

**Mr Bryant:** The problem is that there is a line you cannot cross, which is a fence that borders the national or state park, or another area, and you can see the animals actively running back into that turf. The farmers who shoot on their own property tell us that they see the animals doing this day in, day out, especially the feral pigs. They will run back into that paddock in the daytime to have a rest because they know they are safe, and then at night they will come out and absolutely trash the land. As you are all from the various regions I am sure you have seen the damage that some of these animals do.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We have. Are you saying that it would only be of benefit to extend hunting areas where there are already existing towns and that there would be no economic benefit to open up hunting in areas of the state where there are no towns?

**Mr Bryant:** There is a flow-on effect where you have to get fuel, for instance, on your way to wherever it might be. I have dropped an extra document into what you have been provided with that shows some of the stuff we are already doing, as you have mentioned, so I have listed some of those in it, but it also talks about DEC and the mismanagement of the properties controlled by DEC that

have taken over. They are out in the bush. There is no question about, it is miles away—Gascoyne and the back of those areas—but the flow-on effect is that you have to have some accommodation. You have got to have somewhere to stay in terms of money. Then there is the fuel to get on your way in and you have to get some supplies from the local shop because, at the end of the day, you have got to eat. There is an absolute flow-on effect in terms of money into that community and, at the end of the day, it is another form of tourism. It is just that it is one of the unheralded forms of tourism, if you like.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What level of training do you think would be appropriate for recreational hunters if an extended scheme were to be introduced with regards to things like firearms, safety, animal welfare, and precautions regarding the prevention of the spread of disease?

**Mr Godson:** I guess the best way to look at that is to see what is happening in other states. Victoria in particular has public land that is open where people can go on there once they have undertaken their firearms licence, which has a safety course component to it. They pay a basic permit fee to have a permit to take certain species of animals. You can also look at a state like New South Wales that has a higher regulation component and an online booking system. Those sorts of decisions really depend on how much WA would want to spend on setting up a system, but it is one of those things. You want to develop a system that is unique to WA and that the general community would be happy to accept. If a different level of training is required compared with another state—well, Western Australia is unique and if you feel that is what is required to get that working and everyone is happy with it then that is probably the path you would want to follow.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I am glad you recognise that we are unique. We think we are too.

**Mr Godson:** Well it took me a few hours to fly here, and I had a window seat.

**The CHAIRMAN:** And you probably saw our special hunting ground on the way over, once you crossed over the fence.

**Mr Bryant:** Every state is slightly different in the way they do things. I think of the duck test in Victoria where they basically show you a series of images, and if you fail the test you fail the test. But you need to bear in mind too that you can overregulate —

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is to identify species that you are allowed to hunt?

**Mr Bryant:** Yes, absolutely. You do not shoot a protected animal; that is the reality. There are also safety fears and other issues. People think that people will randomly go in and wantonly shoot just about anything. It is not going to happen. You know exactly who it is that has gone into that area, and there is a lot of responsibility on that person at the end of the day. If something goes wrong in that square kilometre someone will say, “Well, hang on, that animal has been shot with this particular calibre and that is what this person was using.” A lot of responsibility goes back to the shooter to do the right thing at the end of the day. By and large, everyone recognises that it is not the licensed shooters who are doing the wrong thing. The commissioner has told me on many occasions, and I believe he has stated it here as well, that it is not the licensed shooters who are the problem, who want to do the right thing across the board. It is just a few individuals out there and generally they are unlicensed. They are just doing the wrong thing. They shoot the odd animal, and some pretty poor behaviour goes on from time to time. Unfortunately, the local coppers in those areas know who they are but they cannot do anything about it, or do not have the resources or the time to do anything about it. It is one of those things.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** What numbers of your members or members of the broader hunting community might take the opportunity to undertake such an activity if it was permitted? Do you expect there would be hundreds or thousands?

[9.30 am]

**Mr Bryant:** I think in the range of thousands, for sure.

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**Hon DARREN WEST:** So a significant number of people would be happy to take the opportunity to —

**Mr Bryant:** Absolutely.

**Mr Godson:** Our internal survey showed that 80 per cent of our members hunt or would like to hunt. Part of the package that I have provided to you contains a journal article from the CSIRO's published journal *Wildlife Research*. Some of the key results in that survey showed that 99 per cent of respondents to this hunting survey would be happy to help with pest management. When you look at that sort of figure, it is a lot of people who want to volunteer their time to help the environment by taking out feral animals and being part of a greater program.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** It is a double-edged sword. It shows an area of need but it is also going to be difficult to regulate.

**Mr Godson:** I do not think that that would be the case. It all depends on the foundation regulations that you put in place and the stick approach, just like with drivers where if you step outside what is expected of you, you get hit, and firearm owners have a lot to lose with regard to illegal activity. They will not only get a fine, but they will probably lose access to their firearms if they do something illegal.

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** Just following on from the safety aspect, the recent police review of current licensed firearm owners that is already out there has, in itself, created a lot of media in the last week around people not following their firearms licence guidelines and who have actually had their firearms removed from them. Given that no recreational hunting goes on in Western Australia now, they are people like pastoralists and farmers who are conscientiously trying to do the right thing. One of the issues that we face with recreational hunting is the public perception around the management of firearms. Given that we already see breaches of those acts with people who hold current licences, do you think that that has had an impact on how you would regulate and manage that area if you had more recreational hunters being granted firearms? We already have a problem, so how would the police manage or regulate that? I take on board the commissioner's comment that he did not think that having a rec hunting system would impact greatly on the system as it is currently, but clearly that was before the police starting an investigation into current firearm licences.

**Mr Bryant:** One of our problems with the Firearms Act, which is under review—we have constantly been in discussions with many people in Parliament but I have not met many of you guys before, which is unusual—is the way that the police make a determination on how it should be. In particular, the latest one in Albany deals with safes. It was determined some time ago that any safe over a certain height would need a third hinge. A lot of these guys who have safes are farmers who, at the end of the day, want to do the right thing, but without realising they have become a paper criminal overnight because of some determination by an officer at firearms branch. I have a safe at home that quite clearly says on the top: "In compliance with WA firearms regulations and act." It is 1.3 metres high, but it does not have the third hinge, it is illegal. If that safe was in a farmer's house at some point—had he had it for 10 or 20 years, the timeframe does not matter—and it was deemed to be okay way back then but an officer has determined that this is not legal anymore and he wants that extra hinge in the middle, just to stop it flexing, that farmer would not know about it because he has never received a letter from the police. There has been no communication and their response is, "Oh well, go to our website." Sorry, I should not say it here—you are right though, it is laughable —

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** Do you not think there is an onus on the firearm holder to —

**Mr Bryant:** There is to a degree, but there is an onus on the police to say, "Hey guys, we have made a decision." And they need to advertise. They talk about talking on your phone while driving. There was a big media blitz or a big campaign about what you should and should not be doing. It is

no different for firearms. They decided probably less than a year ago that we will now store powder in a safe. Powder used to be covered under the Mines Act where the idea was that if your house was on fire, you could pick it up—it was in a locked box—and run out the door so that the powder did not catch fire and cause extra issues with the house. They have now determined that not only the powder, but an empty brass, an empty case of ammunition—I am sure some of you have seen a .22 before—is a component of ammunition. A lead pellet for an air rifle is one round of ammunition. These determinations are making it incredibly hard for everyone to be compliant because they just change their mind overnight and ram it down your throat that, “Oh, you guys are doing the wrong thing.” Thankfully though, in most circumstances that I hear about the police have walked into the house, the guy is doing something wrong in some basic way and they have said, “Look mate, 24 hours, we will come back tomorrow, please sort yourself out. You have one dynabolt instead of three.” They are being quite generous about how they apply the regulations. However, if someone is clearly doing the wrong thing, if they have an illegal firearm or whatever, they are going in, seizing the firearms and doing that.

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** Given that we have a difficulty that you have recognised in firearm owners keeping up with legislative or regulative change, is there a problem with the renewal of licences and knowing if someone is compliant or not if we extend the system?

**Mr Bryant:** How long do you want me to go on about the firearm licensing in this state? Is it another story again by comparison.

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** Well, it is intimately linked.

**Mr Bryant:** Absolutely. All I can say is that they have made it that hard and onerous in this state that to have a firearms licence you have to be an absolute model citizen. You have to have ticked all the boxes, done all the right things and be above reproach. You have had criminal level checks in not only this state, but at a national level through the internal police system. You are an absolute model citizen. I could not put it any other way. The people who have the licence and who have done all the right things do not want to lose that bit of paper. The investment into firearms is—personally, I have one rifle worth \$4 500 that I shoot foxes with. I do not want to lose that.

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** I agree that people who seek licenses are conscientiously trying to do the right thing. I guess what I am getting at is the potential for the current system. If we extend the opportunity for licencing to recreational hunting and we already have these issues with people who are non-compliant and not aware of what their compliance issues are, then we need to make some change there I would suggest.

**Mr Bryant:** By the very process of applying for this category, for want of a better way of putting it, you have received the information about—what better way than to give them the bit of extra information, “Hey, are you aware that a safe is meant to be like this and the powder is meant to be kept like this?” It is a great opportunity to give them that extra bit of information to make sure they are absolutely compliant. We tell our members daily about what they can do and what they should not do. However, and let us call them the great unwashed out there, there are about 84 000 shooters out there, generally farmers and recreational shooters, who have no idea. It is particularly the farmers who ring us and say, “Hey, what do I do? Can I store it in the shed? Can I do this or that? Is it okay to leave it in the ute?” The number of phone calls we get seeking legal assistance because they did not realise they made some basic blue—for the people going through this process, it is a great opportunity to give them a bit of extra education and by that in itself you have lifted the standards, if you want to call it that.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** I have two questions and the Chair mentioned this in her first question. The Department of Parks and Wildlife mentioned in their evidence that they have organised pest control programs where they contact those associations and bring them in to do the pest control. I guess I am still struggling to see what benefit there is to the department and recreational shooters, so would it not be better to expand those programs that are highly regulated

and to do that more frequently so there is a mutual benefit? It is well organised and the communities concerned about recreational hunting know that it will be organised by the department, and there is no fear of bush walkers wandering in or campers inadvertently ending up there. What is the difference, from your point of view, between expanding those programs and actually allowing it on unallocated land?

[9.40 am]

**Mr Godson:** I guess it comes down to what Western Australia feels it wants in a recreational hunting system. If the only way it is going to go forward is to have a highly regulated coordinated program, certainly the Sporting Shooters Association has runs on the boards with its conservation and wildlife management programs, which run across the country and have some keystone species that they have helped in South Australia—the yellow-tailed wallaby and the Queensland bridled nailtail wallaby. Certainly, that is a very high level of coordination where we are looking at a team environment, team leaders, which means a high level of resources. If the Western Australian government feels that that is the way it wants to go, which is a research-rich activity, so be it. But if we want to bring it down a notch to allow this sort of system to have access for all hunters from all organisations, we certainly can look at it a little differently by just bringing back the management of it, and just starting with ground-level regulations. The New South Wales model has an online booking system, so they know who is in there at the time. They have a maximum number of people they have deemed safe for a particular area. They have areas that are no-go zones. With modern technology these days, GPSs, certain areas within state land can be made available for pest control at that time away from where maybe walking trails and hikers are. We can certainly go a number of ways. The technology is there to create buffer zones, extra safety zones, if that is deemed necessary to allow a lower resource hunting system in.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** Just on the tourism aspect, I know that you stated in your submission that the hunting culture is uniquely Australian and based on safety and ethical behaviour and organised hunting groups, and I have no doubt that that is the case. There is clearly an element that is not as ethical and is engaging in unhelpful practices. If we use it as a tourism attraction, how do we manage those hunting cultures from other countries and other areas that do not have the same sorts of ethics?

**Mr Bryant:** It is no different to fishing. I see it in Victoria, especially with the duck hunting. At Kerang swamp there would be 100 shooters after the ducks for their bag limit. The inspectors would do the big lap, have a look in the box: “What have you got? Well, mate, you’ve got the wrong duck.” It is not unlike fishing where the inspectors are waiting at the boat ramp: “What have you got? Bag limit? You’re over. Gotcha. Unlucky for you, you’ve lost your licence. See you later.”

I want to quickly hark back to your last question: yes, we do operate in different areas, under different CALM areas and different managements. The manager in one district might be all for it, while the manager in another might not like the idea whatsoever. That is part of the issue. This state is one of the last in which quolls are kicking around, and they are at risk of being completely in danger. In some areas we are helping, and some areas we are not, and the quolls are disappearing, plain and simple.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** Do you work in conjunction with a lot of the shires? They might have their red card to get rid of the foxes et cetera. The complexity of getting licences, I think, for sporting shooters is pretty difficult.

**Mr Bryant:** It is a nightmare.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** There are that many legal arms there. If it were relaxed, would you see an improvement?

**Mr Bryant:** I hate using the word “relaxed” or “easier” or any of those terms. This is really purely about cutting red tape. It is like saying, “Nigel, you have a red tie; you’re not allowed to buy

another one. You can't have two red ties. That is ridiculous." That is like having one 12 gauge already and not being allowed to have another one; being told that there is no need for it. Well, I do need it. My young son who is 15 actually comes out with me occasionally. One can be quite heavy; one can be quite light. Trying to explain that to them and getting some commonsense into them—one has to throw all logic out the window. I am sick of the court cases, to be honest. We should not be like that.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** How many of the projects that the Department of Parks and Wildlife engaged SSAA on would you undertake a year?

**Mr Bryant:** I honestly could not tell you, but it is a lot. I see some of the reports—I do not have them with me, and I did not collate that number. But regularly, pretty much every weekend, most teams go out somewhere.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** Is it possible to get that information for the past 12 months provided as supplementary?

**Mr Bryant:** I will get it for you. I have actually listed some of the projects in that secondary document with the header on it so that it makes it a bit easier.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We will let you know that we have asked for that as supplementary information.

**Mr Bryant:** You can quite easily look at the red card information; that is all over the website. That is a really easy one. There are some projects that are quite sensitive and that we cannot talk about, especially some of the stuff we have been doing down in the Albany region.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** With the department?

**Mr Bryant:** Yes, with departments and with police.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We would not want you to breach any confidentiality on our behalf.

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming in today. That brings us to the end of our questions. We had quite limited time, but you have given us some good information today and your written submissions also will help us in our deliberations when we finally come to the end of the inquiry. I thank you for attending today.

**Mr Bryant:** Thanks for your time, ladies and gentlemen.

**Hearing concluded at 9.47 am**

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