

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

INQUIRY INTO THE POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONTRIBUTION OF RECREATIONAL HUNTING SYSTEMS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 20 AUGUST 2014**

SESSION FOUR

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)

Hearing commenced at 10.18 am**Dr EDDY WAJON****Past President, Wildflower Society of WA Inc, sworn and examined:****Mrs MARY GRAY****Member, Wildflower Society of WA;****President, Urban Bushland Council WA Inc, sworn and examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for coming today. Mary, it is very nice to see you as always; you and I have met on a number of occasions in different forums. I think this is the first time you have come to give evidence to the public administration committee, so I will just very quickly run through the introductions. I am Liz Behjat, the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Administration. I represent the North Metropolitan Region. To my left, we have Hon Rick Mazza representing the Agricultural Region; Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson representing the East Metropolitan Region; the deputy chairman, Hon Darren West, also represents the Agricultural Region; our advisory officer, Dr Julia Lawrinson; and Hon Nigel Hallett from the South West Region. Not with us today is Hon Jacqui Boydell from the Mining and Pastoral Region. Most of the regions are covered here. We need to go through the formalities of swearing you in, so I ask you to take an oath or an affirmation, please.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

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

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard; a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you refer to during the course of this hearing for the record. Please be aware of the microphones and try to speak into them; ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make noise near 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 a contempt of Parliament and may mean that material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

You have given to us some handouts here that are further to your written submission that you provided to the committee. Perhaps you would just like to talk to the extra things you have given us, Dr Wajon.

Dr Wajon: Indeed; thank you very much. You will have seen our submission, in which we listed a number of reasons why we oppose the opportunity for recreational hunting in public lands to control pest animals. In our submission we list, in a table, a series of reasons why we oppose this proposal. The first one is “Recreational hunting does not control vertebrate pests”. In my handout, under my signature, I listed a number of issues as to why we believe that that amplifies what we

have stated. A lot of this is from my personal experience, because I own a bush block for conservation and we have a feral animal problem on that bush block.

The CHAIRMAN: Where is that, just generally?

Dr Wajon: We have two: one is Tenterden and one is in Boxwood Hill. The Tenterden property is 46 hectares; the Boxwood Hill property is 576 hectares, is in the Gondwana Link and has a conservation covenant on it. We have problems with pigs, rabbits, cats and foxes, as well as some insect-type pests, but I am particularly talking about vertebrate pests. What we find is that feral animals are very smart. The ones that mostly are a problem are quite small; the foxes, rabbits and cats for example. They are very hard to find in the bush; they hide easily. Cats are notoriously difficult to find, and they are very hard to shoot in the bush, where sight is particularly restricted. It is much easier to shoot these animals on farmland. To shoot these animals you need to be very patient. You need to stake them out, and most people do not have that required patience. Most feral animals are active at night, when most recreationals, we find, do not shoot. We have tried to participate in the annual Red Card for Rabbits and Foxes shoot; we got in touch with some of the registered shooters in the Albany area who were interested, and they actually came out to our property to have a look. But we find that the red card for fox day does not actually kill many animals. When the invitation to shoot on our property was given, nobody actually came up because they found it too difficult; there were much easier places to shoot on private land in farmland than on our place, which has bush. As part of a DPaW grant, we engaged a shooter for 12 months. We paid them \$500 a day to come and control and shoot feral animals on our property—whatever they could find; rabbits, cats, foxes and pigs. After four months of a 12-month contract, they quit. This was just too difficult; they could not handle the pressure. So we believe that recreational hunting does not provide an effective control mechanism for feral animals.

In our handout, entitled “Is recreational hunting effective for feral animal control?” which is published by the Invasive Species Council, they list a number of fallacies as to why recreational hunting is not effective. We agree with many of those points, that it is in fact not effective. The only effective way to control feral animals is through a regular program—a regular, professional, supervised program of professional people. Not only do you need to kill the animals that are on a property, but also there is very rapid incursion; you cannot leave it. We also do baiting on our property of a number of different kinds—meat baits, egg baits, grain baits—and we find we have to be there frequently; every month at least. We get the baits taken very, very frequently, so we have to replace them. It is an integrated program. We believe that recreational hunting will do a lot of damage to our native biodiversity, and we are particularly interested in the flora of course.

There is a great risk that recreational hunters will spread dieback and weeds. We have a great problem even on our property controlling dieback. We have wash down procedures at our gate, we make sure our vehicles are clean, and we strictly enforce this. It is very difficult to do in the bush. I work in a company where they do clearing inspections, and it is extremely difficult to manage dieback. There will be increased trampling and track damage from recreational hunters going into bushland; we have seen that through other activities. I also belong to the WA Native Orchid Study and Conservation Group, and we go on orchid field trips. We have often seen tracks that have been degraded in areas where we are looking at orchids; bogs created, areas that are disturbed as they try to get around bogs, cars coming rushing around corners and disturbing the peace and putting our safety at risk.

There is going to be increased camping in the bush, with cutting down of vegetation and the risk of fire. There will be a danger to people in the bush—walkers, campers, naturalists, DPaW staff—with potential shooting incidents. We believe there is going to be a likely introduction of additional feral animals—that is substantiated in the document we have also tabled today—such as feral pigs and other animals that hunters like to kill. There is great risk that native animals will also be killed, either through misidentification or other skill errors.

We also believe that recreational hunting will be impossible to control. DPaW do not have the resources to do any monitoring; they do not have enough funds to monitor off-road vehicles at the moment, which cause a huge amount of damage in our natural areas, either in Perth, in the metropolitan area, or further afield.

Recreational hunting will be irregular and uncoordinated. As I have stated before, that is not a successful program for managing feral animals. The only way to control feral animals is by an integrated program of baiting, trapping and targeted shooting by professionals, under the control of professionals, as part of a documented, scientifically established program. We need trained people, not recreational hunters.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for that, Dr Wajon. Do you have relationships with other societies similar to your own in states like New South Wales and Victoria, where they do have recreational hunting systems in place; and, if so, have you shared information with them in regard to damage that is potentially done to flora in those states with those systems that are in place?

Dr Wajon: The Wildflower Society is a regional member of the Australian Native Plants Society of Australia, and we have biannual conferences. We do share information, but I do not have any documented material to share with you on the issue of recreational hunting. I have had anecdotal comments that they are very concerned about this, that they do not wish it to occur, but I have no documents to say what has happened.

The CHAIRMAN: That is fine.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Dr Wajon, you are obviously very passionate about this.

Dr Wajon: Yes; thank you.

Hon RICK MAZZA: The red card for foxes program that you mentioned, it is my understanding that each year they take approximately 5 000 foxes. That would have to be a fairly good thing, would it not?

Dr Wajon: When you have 200 000 foxes in WA, it is a drop in the bucket.

Hon RICK MAZZA: But 5 000 foxes, though, would save a lot of wildlife?

Dr Wajon: No.

Hon RICK MAZZA: It does not?

Dr Wajon: No.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Okay; interesting.

Dr Wajon: The reason being that this is a one-day effort; the foxes will be back there within a month.

Hon RICK MAZZA: You mentioned about the difficulty of shooting feral cats and foxes and other pest animals in the forest, and the time and patience needed to do that. Have you considered that volunteer shooters do often have the time and patience to undertake those programs, whereas for a professional shooter it is just way too expensive for them to be spending that sort of time in trying to deal with things like feral cats that I know are very, very elusive animals?

Dr Wajon: Yes, and no. I indicated my experience with engaging a professional person myself; I have also had expressions of interest from recreational people. But I am also aware of the program undertaken by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy in the Kimberley on their fenced properties, where they in fact are paying people to effectively control feral cats. That is the only way to do it; it has been sustained and professional, and the people have to be well trained. It cannot be done by one-off recreational target shooting.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Just one last question, if I can. Your reference to the Invasive Species Council: it is my understanding that they are an animal rights group.

Dr Wajon: Not that I am aware of, no; they are affiliated with the CRC for invasive pests. I am not sure they are an animal rights group.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Yes, I did read somewhere that they may be. Anyway, that is the end of my questions; thank you.

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: You may well have expressed this already, but why do you think that people who own land for conservation purposes or cattle or farming of some sort do not invite recreational hunters onto their land to control feral animals?

Dr Wajon: If we could guarantee that they are responsible and effective, there may be an option there. But as I said, it needs to be part of a coordinated program, it needs to be regular, they need to have conservation ethic at heart and not as a sideline, and they need to be coordinated and well trained.

[10.30 am]

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: Are there many instances that you know of where people do invite recreational hunters onto their land to control pest animals?

Dr Wajon: No.

Mrs Gray: Can I speak to the paper I have presented to you?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, but it will have to be quite short, Mary, please; we have our next witnesses to hear from.

Mrs Gray: Okay.

I would like to focus on the Perth metropolitan region and just emphasise that there is already a significant problem out there with the subculture and habits of people in off-road vehicles and with their recreational activities. Bush bashing, rubbish dumping and the shooting of protected wildlife occurs in many of our conservation areas. This is in the Perth metropolitan region, and it results in irreversible degradation. The Banksia woodlands of the Swan coastal plain are especially vulnerable to degradation by disturbance of the top soil. Once the top 10 centimetres is disturbed—it is mostly sand—degradation sets in, and it is irreversible. Professor Stephen Hopper from the University of Western Australia often quotes that, and he gives his own examples. I can give an example of it in the metropolitan region—the Anstey–Keane damplands in Bush Forever site 342 in Forrestdale. This site is very rich in species of flora and fauna; it is in the highest category for conservation—top of the range. Serial rubbish dumping, bashing of gates and fences to gain access, timber cutting, horseriding, trail bike riding and bush bashing by four-wheel drives are all commonplace recreational activities there. Indeed, last year on the long weekend of Monday, 30 September, the Wildflower Society and the Urban Bushland Council jointly had a guided bushwalk there, and we had about 60 people along. Just as we finished, two horseriders came out of the bushland and told us that there was somebody in there shooting. So indeed we had had 60 people in there at risk of a stray bullet. This is in the metropolitan region. Also, the wildlife was obviously at risk; they were there shooting wildlife in a conservation area. This is totally unacceptable. This is not the only site where this sort of thing happens. We are in a biodiversity hotspot of the world, and the Perth region is a sub-hotspot of national and international significance. But it is a very fragile environment, and we have a real problem with this hoon culture. It is very destructive.

The presence of recreational shooters is already there, it is already uncontrolled, and there is no way I believe that it could be controlled. We strongly recommend that a licensed recreational shooting system not be introduced for Western Australia. As has already been said by Eddy and other speakers here today, we further recommend that much more resources be allocated to conservation land managers to properly look after the conservation estate, with on-ground management resources going in and on-ground ranger services. Those land managers are mostly DPaW, but also a lot of local government authorities in the metropolitan region. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for that, Mary.

As there are no further questions from our members here, that brings to the end your evidence today. We thank you for taking the time and for coming to see us today, and also for your written submission. You can be sure that they will be taken into account when we get to our deliberation phases of this inquiry. Thank you very much.

Hearing concluded at 10.34 am
