



NSW Legislative Council Hansard

Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill

Extract from NSW Legislative Council Hansard and Papers Tuesday 24 May 2005.

Second Reading

The Hon. HENRY TSANG (Parliamentary Secretary) [5.44 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Introduced species of animals are an important issue facing this state. Some types of introduced animals inhabit over 95 per cent of New South Wales. These wild game and feral animals include species such as foxes, feral pigs and rabbits that are well known for their agricultural and environmental impacts. These animals also include less well known species such as feral goats and wild deer. We are all aware of the damage that can be caused by introduced species of animals and birds. They eat native vegetation and damage sensitive environments. They destroy crops, pasture and fencing, and they can also spread parasites and disease.

To deal with this problem, the Government established a strong legislative framework to control the impact of these animals, for example, the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 with provisions to manage key threatening processes and help recover populations of threatened species and the Rural Lands Protection Act 1998 with provisions requiring pest animals to be controlled. One thing that has sometimes limited the capacity to address these impacts in the past, particularly in the case of species that cause widespread damage, was a way to better co-ordinate the use of responsible hunters as a resource to help control these animals.

The need to identify, train and license responsible hunters is addressed by provisions in the Game and Feral Animal Control Act, which also contains provisions to regulate game hunting. The objectives of the Game and Feral Animal Control Act are to provide for effective management of introduced species of game animals, and to promote responsible and orderly hunting of those animals, on both private and public land, and hunting of certain pest animals on public land. The Act established the Game Council to oversee these functions. The council provides advice to the Government on game management, and co-operates with other agencies on game animal control measures. The Game Council also works with government and responsible hunters to help restore natural animal habitat in New South Wales, and, when it is financially responsible to do so, will fund conservation projects on rural lands.

Another way in which the council carries out its role is through orderly licensing of game hunters to hunt wild game and feral animals. Programs being developed by the Game Council offer significant potential benefits to the State's native flora and fauna, and to farmlands. The council deserves the thanks of the House for the useful and important work it is doing. The council comprises 16 members, including some from hunting organisations and government agencies. The Game Council first met late in 2002 and since then has been progressively implementing the various requirements of the legislation.

Among other things, the Act requires the Game Council to manage the issuing of two types of hunting licences. One is the general hunting licence that covers hunting on private land, and the other is the restricted hunting licence that also allows hunting on certain public land in prescribed circumstances. General hunting licences first became available in early September 2004, and to date some 4,000 general hunting licence applications have been lodged. Hunters can be an effective tool to assist in feral animal control and the Game Council is now working with stakeholders on the declaration of appropriate public land for hunting, particularly in areas where feral animal populations are high. A thorough risk assessment and consultation process is being undertaken to determine areas of public land where game hunting may become available in future.

Turning now to the bill before the House, the Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill introduces two main amendments to the Act. These deal with the source of the council's funding and the items on which the council can spend its funds. The amendments will improve the operation of the council and the work that it engages in. The council has been closely involved in the preparation of these amendments. Funding for the council has primarily come from government grants, but the council aims to become self-supporting in the long term.

The amendments in the bill extend the range of funding sources to include the proceeds of fines imposed under the Act. This will cover offences created under the Act or its regulations and offences against the Game Hunting Code of Practice. At present, proceeds from fines paid under the Game and Feral Animal Control Act go into

consolidated revenue. Under the amendments in this bill, as I have indicated, proceeds from fines would be credited to the Game Council itself. This will help the council move towards financial self-sufficiency and help to meet the cost of discharging its regulatory functions under tight budgetary constraints. While the Act clearly anticipates that training should minimise the need for harsher compliance measures, it also anticipates the need to penalise those who break the rules. It is reasonable that the proceeds from fines be used to help the Game Council enforce these requirements.

The Game Council has employed five game managers, and part of their duties will be to enforce these requirements. Various offences are prescribed under the Act that may be referred to a court, and there is also provision for penalty notices to be issued for certain offences. This approach to funding is not new. The Rural Lands Protection Act 1998 and the Local Government Act 1993 already provide for proceeds of fines to be credited to the relevant board or council. These Acts provide a fitting precedent for the proposals before the House. The second aspect of the bill is the amendment to section 13, which specifies how the council can spend its funds. Section 13 currently lists matters on which the council can spend its money. This list is too restrictive and needs to be expanded.

An amendment to section 13 will allow the council to spend money on other matters, as long as they are listed in the regulations. It is intended that the regulations will include the development of training courses and funding for research. For instance, the council has an opportunity to develop and deliver a new course on responsible hunting in collaboration with the University of Sydney. But at present the narrow scope of section 13 does not permit the council to do this. The council could also seek opportunities to fund research in areas where this may currently be lacking or where research may be improved in future, for example, interaction between game and non-game animals. While these are minor changes to the legislation, they will substantially improve the practical operation of the Act and the ability of the Game Council to meet its objectives. As such, I call on all honourable members to support the changes. I commend the bill to the House.