

Bill introduced, and read a first time and ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon. Robert Brown.

Second Reading

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN [10.25 a.m.]: I move:
That this bill be now read a second time.

The Shooters and Fishers Party is pleased to introduce the Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill 2012—a bill that provides for a sensible, simple and practical conservation outcome. It is a conservation bill. A previous Premier was pragmatic enough to accept major parts of a similar bill, before reneging on his offer to allow conservation hunting in nearly 60 national parks. As I have said before, I have a marked-up map in my office showing within which parks that Premier was prepared to allow conservation hunting. The Premier following him took advice from the then member for Balmain and the member for Marrickville—both electorates that are hardly the bastions of feral animal plagues in our State. It seems what happened in the end was that it was easier to send Frank Sartor to the Hon. Ian Cohen and do a deal involving the declaration of river red gum forests as national parks—

DEPUTY-PRESIDENT (The Hon. Paul Green): Order! The member will be heard in silence.

Mr David Shoebridge: What is the Christian element in this? Why are the Christians voting for this?

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: —in return for Greens' preferences, thereby sinking the previous bill.

DEPUTY-PRESIDENT (The Hon. Paul Green): Order! I call Mr David Shoebridge to order for the first time.

Mr David Shoebridge: You're embarrassed.

DEPUTY-PRESIDENT (The Hon. Paul Green): Order! There is no need for the member to be disrespectful to the Chair.

Mr David Shoebridge: Because you're embarrassed.

The Hon. Robert Borsak: That's outrageous.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: I do, however, thank many former Labor members, in particular members of Country Labor, who understood the value of such a bill. As for the Coalition, when its members last saw this bill they were generally supportive but wanted to negotiate a couple of issues. In fact, we have gone so far as to address each of their concerns in this new, far simpler bill.

The Hon. Rick Colless: Point of order: This is a very important bill, and I would think all

members would want to hear the mover's justification for bringing it forward. I ask that members opposite be brought under control. They should remain silent and listen to the argument. They will have their chance to have their say on the bill next week.

DEPUTY-PRESIDENT (The Hon. Paul Green): Order! The member raises a valid point. All members have the right to put their points forward during debate. I ask members to respect that right.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: I am hopeful, therefore, that the Government will support the bill, unamended, through all stages in this House and in the other place. The threat of feral animals in our national parks is great, and even more so after recent floods when the population of feral cats, foxes, pigs, wild dogs and goats has exploded. But of course The Greens, all but one of whom live east of the Iron Cove Bridge, would not know that.

The Hon. John Ajaka: Point of order: I almost do not need to take my point of order, given that it has become a complete free-for-all for those opposite and on the crossbenches. Members have the right to hear the member speaking. I cannot hear a word because of constant interjection. The Greens have had many opportunities to bring in private members' bills—

The Hon. Rick Colless: Many.

The Hon. John Ajaka: Many. And they have been heard in silence when they have introduced those bills. Other members should be afforded the same courtesy. I strongly suggest that members who cannot remain silent be asked to leave the Chamber.

DEPUTY-PRESIDENT (The Hon. Paul Green): Order! I remind members that interjections are disorderly at all times.

Mr David Shoebridge: It is disorderly to do a grubby deal with the Government about national parks—and it is a grubby deal you are a part of.

DEPUTY-PRESIDENT (The Hon. Paul Green): Order! I call Mr David Shoebridge to order for the second time. Members will show the member with the call some respect and listen to him in silence. Members will have an opportunity to contribute to the debate.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: The utilisation of volunteer conservation hunters, which has been working well in our State Forests since 2006, works particularly well in Victoria and elsewhere in Australia and overseas. A statutory five-year review of the Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002 was thorough and provided a detailed assessment of that Act. The review group agreed that game and feral animals cause impacts to public health and safety, private property, agriculture and the environment, and that establishing a council to facilitate, promote and manage hunting has reduced those impacts. Accordingly, it concluded that the policy objective remained valid. This bill addresses some of the recommendations for reform found in that statutory review.

The principal features of this amending bill are as follows. The bill will allow the Minister responsible for national park estate land to declare that land, under the Game and Feral Animal Control Act, for the purposes of hunting game animals by persons who hold a restricted game hunting licence. Furthermore, the bill makes a number of other amendments

of an administrative, minor or consequential nature to the Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002, to the regulations, to the Firearms Act 1996 and to the Rural Lands Protection Act 1998.

The bill ensures that the intent of the legislation is consistent with the Game Council objectives, which are to provide for the effective management of introduced species of game animals and to promote the responsible and orderly hunting of those game animals and of certain pest animals on public and private land. The Game Council NSW is clearly the lead agency for the licensing and regulating of conservation hunting in New South Wales, with that system providing a range of genuine benefits for the people of the State, the economy and, importantly, the environment.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I call the Hon. Jeremy Buckingham to order for the first time.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: The Game Council NSW was established as a statutory authority by the New South Wales Parliament under the Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002 and its associated Game and Feral Animal Control Regulation 2004. One of its major objectives is to harness the efforts of licensed and accredited hunters to help in the reduction of some of the nation's worst pests, such as pigs, goats, foxes and rabbits. Under the Game Council NSW we have seen the introduction of the game hunting licence system, the production at government level of the State's first hunter education handbook and the declaration of around 400 State forests and Crown land areas for pest control by volunteer conservation hunting licence holders.

There are an estimated 7.2 million foxes throughout Australia. They kill an estimated 190 million native birds annually and threaten the survival of many small Australian mammals. That is a fact that The Greens do not seem to understand or appreciate. According to the report "Counting the cost: Impact of Invasive Animals in Australia, 2004", the cost impact nationally of 11 feral animal species alone totals \$720 million per annum. More than 95 per cent of New South Wales is inhabited by some species of wild or feral animal which, if left unmanaged, may adversely affect the environment and damage agricultural production. As at March 2012, the Game Council NSW had issued more than 17,000 game hunting licences, and that number is expected to reach 20,000 by the end of the year. Since 2004 approximately 2,600,000 game and feral animals have been removed from all lands—public and private—by those licensed game hunters alone in New South Wales. Last year Game Council licence holders removed nearly 800,000 game and feral animals on both private and public land, and are now on target to remove one million in one year. This, by any calculation, is a huge contribution to the management of feral animals in New South Wales and we should all congratulate the Game Council NSW on its conservation efforts. In addition, it is expected that game hunting licence holders will spend more than \$100 million of their own money in pursuit of their volunteer hunting efforts, with most of that spending occurring in regional New South Wales. It is also important to note that the Game Council NSW is a statutory authority and that all funds raised by it go directly back into future council activities, and research and conservation projects.

Schedule 1 [4] and schedule 1 [5] amend the definition of "public land" so that it includes, rather than excludes, as is the case at present, national park estate land that includes national parks and other land reserved under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974. The effect of this amendment is that the Minister responsible for national park estate land may declare any such land as public hunting land under section 20 of the Act, as Ministers responsible for other public lands may declare the lands under their respective control. At the same time, the bill lists certain national park estate land that cannot be made available for volunteer

conservation hunting of game and pest animals. Under the Act, hunting of game and pest animals on public land is permitted only if the land is declared to be available for hunting. The amendments to schedule 1 [3] and [12] are consequential, and schedule 1 [2] inserts a definition of "declared public hunting land" for clarification purposes. Another aspect of the bill is the inclusion of other pest animals that may be hunted. Schedule 1 [6] recasts the provision of the Act and specifies the game animals that may be hunted in accordance with the Act so that the provision refers instead to a list set out in proposed schedule 3. The list of game animals contains two separate parts. For example, the game animals currently referred to in section 5 (2) of the Act will now be listed in parts 1 and 2 of new schedule 3. The list can be amended by ministerial order, but must specifically exclude native animals from being added by such an order.

Amendments to schedule 1 [2], [15] and [16] are consequential. Schedule 1 [7] provides for exemptions from certain offences under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 and the regulations under that Act, insofar as those offences would otherwise relate to the lawful hunting by the holders of a game licence. It also provides that certain orders and notices under other legislation cannot prevent or interfere with hunting in accordance with a game hunting licence. Since the passing of the original Game and Feral Animal Control Bill 2002, hunters have demonstrated a thoroughly professional approach towards feral animal control and have also proven over the years the value of volunteer conservation hunting both on Crown lands and on private property. Despite any legislation in place, however, there will always be people who will not want to accept any form of hunting—such as Mr David Shoebridge and his friends in The Greens.

The PRESIDENT: Order! If the Hon. Robert Borsak and the Hon. Jeremy Buckingham want to conduct a conversation they should do so outside the Chamber.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: For this reason, and for their safety and the safety of hunters, schedule 1 [24] extends the existing offence of obstructing, hindering or impeding an inspector to include assaulting, threatening or intimidating an inspector. Schedule 1 [25] creates a new offence of not complying with a direction by an inspector to leave or not to enter declared public hunting land. Such directions may be given to a person if the inspector has reason to believe that the person is committing an offence under the Act. Schedule 1 [26], proposed section 55B prohibits commercial taxidermists from preserving or preparing the skin of certain game animals unless satisfied the animals have been hunted by a licensed game hunter or by a person with some other lawful authorisation—for example, under the existing National Parks and Wildlife Act. Commercial taxidermists will be required to record certain information and to make those records available for inspection. The bill also makes a number of miscellaneous amendments.

Schedule 1 [13] provides that a game hunting licence authorises the licence holder to possess the carcass or the skin or any other part of a game animal that the licence holder has harvested under the authority conferred by the licence. Schedule 1 [14] contains a consequential amendment. Schedule 1 [21] provides that the power of an inspector to require a vehicle to stop may be exercised without the inspector being accompanied by a police officer. This brings the Act into line with similar provisions in the Fisheries Management Act 1994.

Licensed hunters who assist the Game Council NSW in providing effective management of pest animals and game animals under a regime where they are accredited and can properly identify the appropriate game have a great deal to lose if they do the wrong thing. Any

breaches of the Act or regulations will potentially lead to court action and heavy penalties, including forfeiture of their hunting equipment. If that equipment includes, for example, cars and expensive rifles and camping equipment this could amount to many thousands of dollars. Therefore, hunters have an incentive to do the right thing. Schedule 1 [22] removes the limit on the amount of a "thing"—that is how it is described in the Act—that a Local Court may require to be forfeited in connection with an offence under the Act.

In discussions with the Government, we have removed a clause in this bill that would have banned the use of particular types of poison in the management of game animals on declared public hunting land. This clause was specifically aimed at preventing the use of salt lick blocks, laced with deadly poisons—not 1080—aimed at killing large animals such as deer or horses in a cruel way, and the inherent danger to native animals. The Government has given an assurance that the trial of this method, which was due to begin shortly, will be postponed indefinitely to allow for a proper scientific assessment of this method, and will include both Game Council and national park representatives in this assessment.

In addition to these amendments, schedule 2 to the bill proposes a number of amendments of a consequential nature to other legislation. Schedule 2.1 amends the Firearms Act 1996 to enable a public or local authority to give permission to shoot on land that is owned by, or under the control or management of, that authority, and that is not within a metropolitan area, for the purpose of vertebrate pest animal control. Councils and other public land management bodies should be allowed to utilise the system of volunteer conservation hunters for vertebrate pest control on land under their authority. In fact, that has happened but every time it has had to be done under a permit issued by the commissioner.

All the proposed amendments have been carefully drafted so as to ensure that they do not compromise the principles and objects of the Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002. The amendments proposed in the bill will add to the huge contribution that the Game Council currently provides in respect of conservation and protection of livestock in New South Wales. It will provide genuine, measurable benefits to the people, the economy and the environment in this State and at minimal cost to taxpayers. I note that recently in the *Northern Star*, the Hon. Catherine Cusack, who is not in the Chamber, spoke of her visits to several national parks in the past six months. She described the increase in feral animal population as "horrifying".

The Hon. Dr Peter Phelps: It is horrifying.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: It is. She is quite correct. She said:

It is an emergency - we need a state-wide integrated strategy to combat this threat. It needs to be professionally managed across public and private land and everyone including the Game Council has a role to play.

To my mind, there is no better professional body than the Game Council and no more dedicated conservationists than the volunteer conservationists when it comes to the control of game and feral animals in New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps and set down as an order of the day for a future day.