

**Submission
No 345**

**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

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Date received: 31/08/2012

A Submission of behalf of

GameCon

(Game Management Council of New South Wales Incorporated)

On

**INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND
IN NEWSOUTH WALES**

To the

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO 5 LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

AUTHORISED BY

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30 August 2012

GameCon submission will be laid out as follows

1. Introduction
2. Collaborative Approach
3. The conversion of Crown Land, State Forests and agricultural land into National Park estate or other types of conservation areas, including the:
 - a. Process of conversion and the assessment of potential operational, economic, social
 - b. Environmental impacts
 - c. Operational, economic, social and environmental impacts after conversion,
 - d. Impacts upon neighbours of public land and upon Local Government
4. The following cases considered in relation to Terms of Reference 1(a) and 1(b):
 - a. River Red Gum State Forests in the Southern Riverina,
 - b. Native Hardwood State Forests in Northern NSW,
 - c. Yanga Station in the Balranald Shire, and
 - d. Toorale Station in Bourke Shire.
5. Adherence to pest management practices.
6. Examination of models for the management of public land, including models that provide for conservation outcomes which utilises the principles of “sustainable use”.
7. Any other related matters
8. Conclusion

1 INTRODUCTION

GameCon NSW is a recreation based volunteer organisation (formerly known as the Joint Committee of Recreational Hunting Associations) and was established in 1985 to provide an umbrella group for hunting clubs and associations within New South Wales.

GameCon NSW is a non-profit hunting and conservation organisation representing approximately thirty-thousand like-minded hunters, fishermen, Four Wheel Drive and dog owners through its affiliated organisations. Our members respect the environment and have a multi-cultural affinity with traditional pastimes such as hunting.

GameCon welcomes the opportunity to submit comment to the Standing Committee.

Our submission is an open and honest attempt to uphold safe, cost effective, and workable pest animal management strategies designed to protect the Australia's endangered Flora and Fauna. It is our belief that it is in the best interest of the survival of our endangered species for all interested groups to work together to ensure a whole of community approach to what is clearly a significant threat to our biodiversity.

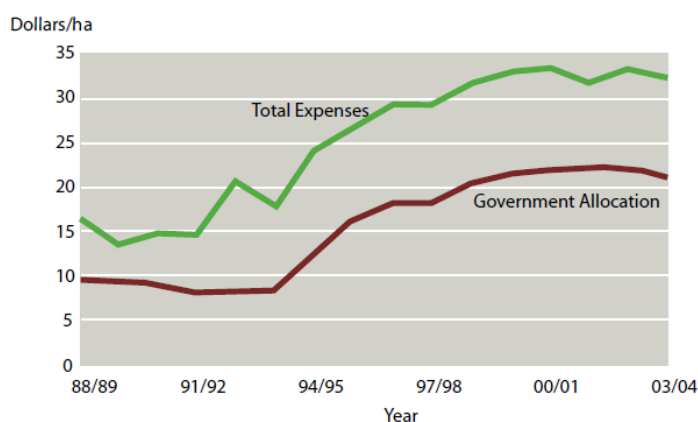
This belief is supported by the following comment from past NSW NPWS Pest management strategies:

“Pests are among the greatest threats to biodiversity throughout Australia. In New South Wales, they have been identified as a threat to 657 of 945 (70%) species, populations and communities listed under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995; more than any other process except the destruction and disturbance of native vegetation”.

For a control program to be regarded as effective it must deliver long term outcomes. It is commonly acknowledged that the eradication of pest animals is not achievable. Therefore control focuses on reduction of impacts.

Often control programs focus attention on areas identified as having large numbers of pest animals and then continue only as long as there is an efficient return of expended resources. This means that as population densities drop so does the cost per animal increase. Programs are therefore stopped when this cost becomes too high leaving a residual population of pest animals breed and to re-establish the pest animal population in the area. While this process may result in short term alleviation of the threat it does not prevent the threat from reoccurring, or put in place strategies to slow down the population growth of the pest species.

The NPWS has persistently employed more people and resources to try cope with the pest problem, bleeding resources away from other critical work required to protect our endangered Flora and Fauna. Management costs per hectare continue to climb (1)



Source: NSW Auditor-General, Performance Audit—Managing Natural and Cultural Heritage in Parks and Reserves, June 2004.

2 COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

GameCon submits that a collaborative approach between the hunting community and the NPWS in the development and ongoing implementation of Regional Pest Management Strategies (RPMS) provides NPWS with an additional measure to ensure an overall reduction in pest animal numbers and an increase in the survival rates of endangered species.

Hunters are willing and able to assist through the provision of licensed, trained and accredited hunters in a volunteer capacity to:

- Identify areas where pest animal population exist
- Aid in the identification of pest distribution
- Identify the presence of new pests or pest populations before they become established
 - Plants included
- Assist in the assessment of the impact of pest animals and weeds
- Assist in the physical control of pest animals
- Report to Police about the location and cultivation of illegal drugs

NPWS has the responsibility to minimise the adverse impacts of pests on biodiversity within its parks. GameCon believes that the utilization of volunteer hunters can greatly assist NPWS in improving pest animal management and ensure that existing NPWS resources can be made to stretch further than they currently do.

Fear mongering and the obtuse statement by Greens politicians that Conservation Hunters can never achieve eradication are intentionally misleading. Validation of this point may be found in NSW State of the Environment Report 2009 (2).

Management and control of invasive species

Eradication of invasive species is seldom feasible. However, control of high priority invasive species, such as foxes and bitou bush, is targeted at areas of high conservation value and is being delivered through TAPs. Broadscale rabbit control is being delivered through the release of myxomatosis

The immense cost of our historically, professionally managed programs has **not** eradicated even one feral species. The mantra of the Greens is to continue total reliance on professionals and demonize Conservation Hunting.

Many thousands of volunteer hunters will augment the activities of already existing pest control agencies. Hunters as volunteers would add little to the cost of current programs but could significantly increase the effectiveness. Hunting is very target specific and when conducted in accordance with the Game Council NSW code of practice is very humane.

J Hogget has stated:

It is worth noting that Tanzania, with 25 per cent of its land in protected areas, makes ten times more revenue from the 10 per cent of tourists that are *hunters* than from the other 90 per cent.²⁰ Perhaps we could make a virtue of necessity by allowing more liberal permits to hunt for pest or abundant species.

(3)

All hunters should be nature lovers. Theodore Roosevelt

3 THE CONVERSION OF CROWN LAND, STATE FORESTS AND AGRICULTURAL LAND INTO NATIONAL PARK ESTATE OR OTHER TYPES OF CONSERVATION AREAS

Game Con believes that additions to the National Park Estate should be put on hold for a significant period of years. It is quite evident that practical considerations of effective park management are not sufficiently considered in relation to the ability of the tax base to fund new parks and the ability of NPWS to cope with existing demands upon their human and financial resources.

Multiple use of public land increases social benefits and improves the cost benefit ratio.

The United States the Bureau of Land Management administers vast tracts of public land. The BLM regulates activities in hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, boating, hang gliding, shooting, off-highway vehicle driving, mountain biking, birding, and visiting natural and cultural heritage sites.

The BLM administers 330,717 km of fishable streams, 8,900 km² of lakes and reservoirs, 10,600 km of floatable rivers, over 500 boating access points, 69 National Back Country Byways, and 300 Watchable Wildlife sites. The BLM also manages 7,200 km of National Scenic, Historic, and Recreational Trails, as well as thousands of miles of multiple use trails used by motorcyclists, hikers, equestrians, and mountain bikers.

Congress used the term "multiple use" management, defined as "management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people."

It is imperative that other forms of public lands management be given more consideration in the future rather than employing a default status for National Parks. We would support greater involvement of community based conservation groups in caring for public land, such as fishing and hunting clubs.

3A ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL OPERATIONAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL

Multiple use of public land must be a key driver in future decisions to establish National Parks. If National Park status should effectively ban grazing, remote camping, fishing, hunting and four wheel driving then future acquisitions should be placed into an alternative type of area that will allow such pursuits.

Adverse economic impacts on adjacent communities must play a significant role in the decision making process. The need to recognize the importance of non-industrial components of a civil and healthy society must be factored in before decisions are reached to establish additional National Parks.

We believe that new National Parks have been primarily established to provide the Greens and other political parties with political capital rather than legitimate environmental needs.

We recommend that this be affected by a mixed use of parks, including grazing and encouragement of private and community based conservation.

3B ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Managing pest populations to minimise their impact on neighbours

An immediate advantage of a cooperative working relationship with hunters would be the ability to instigate cross boundary controls. Hunters on private property could be allowed "right of pursuit" an agreed distance into NPWS estate. Many private landholders utilise hunters to control pest animals on their properties. A frustration is that the hunter must wait until the animal crosses the boundary before culling. Right of pursuit would allow hunters to put pressure on the pest populations adjacent to private property, reducing their

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impact on the livelihood of the landholder. This would not off course work the other way unless the hunter had permission to enter the private property.

Increase community understanding of the adverse impacts of pests on biodiversity

Hunters are very aware of the impacts of pest animals on the environment. In many cases it is the actual damage created by feral animals that hunters use to track and locate the animal. By increasing the involvement of hunters the level of community involvement is increased. Programs could be established that encourage hunting clubs to adopt a section of NPWS estate and commit time and resources to:

- The identification and control of pest animals.
- Locating, monitoring, and assisting in the removal invasive plant species.
- Habitat restoration through tree plantings
- Identification and monitoring of native animal recovery patterns

4 TOORALE STATION IN BOURKE SHIRE

Toorale Station is an example of how the economic impacts of environmental decisions do not adequately address the negative economic impact upon adjacent communities.

Since the station has been purchased we believe that the future of the property should be determined by the local community or it should be placed on the market and sold back to private ownership.

5 ADHERENCE TO PEST MANAGEMENT PRACTISES.

Support cooperative approaches and participation in pest management programs with the community and other agencies.

Focussing on one species will often advantage another by providing additional habitat and food. Hunters predate across all target species and can help reduce this known effect.

If at the conclusion of a control program such as baiting of foxes, hunters were to be given access to the control area and a large buffer zone surrounding it then hunters could target the residual fox population and suppress the population growth of any other pest species that may benefit from the reduction in fox numbers such as rabbits and impact on any migration that may occur from the surrounding areas. This will not eliminate the need for further control operations but will certainly increase the time between operations, thereby reducing the frequency and associated costs. This is an integrated approach that employs more than one control technique and can be applied across all landscape patterns.

This approach is more likely to be effective because it provide suppression of the residual pest animal populations present even after the most intensive controls and will reduce migration through the targeting of a larger area. This method also recognises the potential of removing bait shy animals.

Conservation Hunting on public land would facilitate achievement of the NSW State Goal #25 to *Increase opportunities for seniors in NSW to fully participate in community life.* Along with addressing Goal 22; *The NSW Government will work with the community with landholders to revegetate and improve land, manage weeds and pests in our national parks*

BENEFITS OF CONSERVATION HUNTING TO EXISTING PEST MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Hunters can assist in the following areas:

Pest control is targeted to species/locations where benefits will be greatest

By utilising hunters to scout areas of bushland a more complete picture of the location and abundance of pest animals can be obtained. Hunters are experienced in the identification of animal sign and its identification. This will assist in the targeting of specific populations of pest animals and allow the formation of a plan that covers the initial control and subsequent mopping up operations

Development of control priorities are set by clearly defining the problem to be addressed i.e. specific impacts are identified so that the purpose of control is clear.

Information gathered by hunters can be combined with local knowledge of NPWS staff to more accurately define a problem which will assist in a more accurate decision on priorities.

Where relevant, pest control is collaborative and across tenure, that is, undertaken on a landscape approach

The adoption of a right of pursuit from adjoining land tenures, combined with existing control processes and the addition of hunters in mopping up operations will significantly increase the collaborative nature of pest control programs and increase the effectiveness of the landscape approach

Early detection of new incursions and rapid response is considered a high priority as this is the most cost-effective form of pest control

Hunters can recognise pest animals easily but some may struggle with plants. The production of a small handout allowing for easy identification of pest plant species will enable hunters to locate infestations. The nature of hunting is such that it is carried out away from established tracks in areas that groups such as campers and bushwalkers do not normally go. Hunters typically carry GPS devices and can log the position of the infestation allowing NPWS to accurately follow up and implement rapid control response.

Priority is given to mitigating the impacts on biodiversity of a pest that has cultural significance, whilst minimising impacts on cultural values

Deer are an animal with significant cultural significance to sections of the Australian community. While Deer are often referred to as Feral but it must be noted that this is misleading and factually incorrect.

Deer are recognised under legislation as a Game Animal. It is true that Deer were recently listed as a Key Threatening Process under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act, but it should also be noted that the supporting research was conducted on Rusa Deer in the Royal National Park, on completely different plant species in a completely different climate to the Snowy Mountains Region.

The decision was then simply extrapolated to the other Six species of Deer without any supporting scientific evidence. This practice has received heavy criticism from the scientific community in Australia and overseas due to its lack of scientific rigor. Deer occur in good numbers in the Snowy Mountains Region due to migration from Victoria. The introduction of hunting will significantly reduce the likelihood of the current deer populations expanding to a point where deer begin to cause damage.

Opportunistic ground shooting is unlikely to impact the Deer population if it is restricted to paid employees of the NPWS only, as they have other duties to perform. If incorporated into a structured program involving hunters the likely outcome would improve significantly.

Aerial shooting of Deer in thick bush would be similar to shooting horses. A repeat of the fiasco in the Guy Fawkes National Park is a real possibility and subsequent public relations disaster based on poor animal

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welfare outcomes is foreseeable. Trapping is unlikely to work as it is labor intensive and the currently poor market for venison would mean costs are not recoverable.

The recent decision to allow hunting within National Parks is a welcomed option is to expand the ground shooting of Deer.

The aim of most pest control programs is to minimise the adverse impacts of pests, as many exotic pests are already widespread (e.g. foxes, blackberries) and for these species eradication is not possible.

One great limitation in current pest animal control programs is the fact that once the target population has been reduced the focus of the program moves on to another area of priority. This is supported by the following official quote:

“NPWS prioritises its pest control programs to focus on those areas where the impacts of pests are likely to be greatest. Resources can then be directed to ensure that the resultant control programs are effective in reducing these impacts. The availability of suitable control techniques and resources (both financial and physical), as well as the practicality and cost effectiveness of control, also influence which programs can be implemented”.

When programs are discontinued on a basis of cost effectiveness and a greater need some where else the residual pest animal population then predictably re-establishes itself, requiring further control in the same area at a later date. Integration of hunters into pest control programs by allowing them access to mop up the residual populations, will significantly improve the effectiveness of the control program.

Pest management strives to strike a balance between cost efficiency, target specificity, and animal welfare.

Hunters as volunteers would add little to the cost of current programs but would significantly increase the effectiveness. Hunting is very target specific and when conducted in accordance with the Game Council NSW code of practice is very humane.

Effective and appropriate pest control employs a combination of control methods and strategies (integrated pest management).

Use of hunters adds to a combination of control methods as it currently does on Forests NSW lands.

By integrating hunters into the control process the holistic nature of the program can be enhanced. Hunters can be used to mop up the residual population and place a limiting influence on the other pests who may benefit from the sudden reduction in population of a competitor / predator.

In some circumstances, new programs may be introduced, or priority programs extended to target pests where a control “window of opportunity” is identified e.g. where burnt areas become more accessible for ground control of weeds; where drought makes control of feral pigs and feral goats more efficient because they congregate in areas where water is available; or when a new bio-control agent becomes available.

Monitoring at varying levels demonstrates and improves the ongoing effectiveness of control programs.

NPWS has historically provided minimal transparency in relation to the costs, extent and effectiveness of their pest control efforts. This must not continue. The Game Council efficiently provides a Public Benefit Analysis and so should National Parks.

Hunter returns on animals taken or sighted and involvement in activities such as spotlight surveys could greatly assist in monitoring the effectiveness of these programs.

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Legal hunters provide details such as address and number plates prior to arrival. This data allows significant improvement in the compliance activities of the NPWS in relation to illegal hunting. The information on animals seen and removed would assist NPWS in identifying areas of high density of pest populations and facilitate a more rapid response.

6 EXAMINATION OF MODELS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND AND SUSTAINABLE USE.

Other suitable models that employ multiple use and sustainable outcomes should be adopted in an incremental scale over time.

7 OTHER MATTERS

We would like to emphasise that the activities of passionate modern hunters are not intended to establish a hunting culture as deluded and cynical Greens politicians often accuse our community of doing.

In actual fact, which is patently obvious to any reasonable person, we are only continuing a culture which has existed for hundreds of thousands of years. Hunting culture is respected and fostered throughout the world as having social, psychological and economic value to modern society.

Author, actor, psychologist and environmentalist James Swan PhD and many others have written books on the subject. Highly urbanised Australians typically remain ignorant of the many benefits of hunting.

Game meat can be legally sold to butchers in England. In the United States of America donating game meat to charity is regarded as an act of Christian Charity. Many states have Sportsmen Against Hunger programs, Michigan for example:

Since 1991, MSAH has been working to create linkages between donors, wild game processors, and charities that feed needy individuals. MSAH is an all-volunteer organization and is led by sportsmen and women concerned about making a positive difference in the community. Together, we have assembled a network of processors and charities across Michigan to help channel wild game donations into the hands of those in need.

Michigan leads the nation in hunting license sales. It also led the nation in the increase of working poor families with children from 1975 to 1995. Thanks to generous hunters, farmers, processors, and volunteers the Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger helped facilitate over 50,000 lbs. of wild game donations (primarily venison) in 2000. Many of the individuals who benefit from this program have never been blessed with the opportunity to watch a deer slip through the woods or pull a perch from an auger hole.

Thanks to our participating processors, in the 2008-2009 hunting season MSAH helped facilitate the processing of over 32,800 pounds of venison into nutritious meals for needy families all across Michigan. (4)

“We continue to be Sportsmen Against Hunger and donate our game to the homeless and the shelter less so that we can feed them. There’s no end of things that everyone of can do out there to show Middle America that just because we and fish does not mean that we are not contributing members of society... We care about our country and we’re willing to contribute to our country.”

General Norman Schwarzhopf

(1996 speech to Safari Club International)

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Consequently, conservation hunting has the potential to enhance cultural, creative, sporting and recreation opportunities. NSW State Goal #27 and allow for Increased opportunities for people to look after their own neighbourhoods and environments. Goal #23

8 CONCLUSION

GameCon welcomes NSW's recent decision to embrace conservation hunters as key stakeholders and valuable partners in the control of pest animals within National Parks. We support moving towards a multiple use model for public lands and would caution against increasing the National Park estate without fully considering the financial implications and the resulting restrictions placed upon recreational activities.

- 1 J Hogget, Institute of Public Affairs Backgrounder, Vol. 17/2, 2005
- 2 New South Wales State of the Environment Report, 2009, page 22
- 3 J Hogget, op. cit. page 13
- 4 <http://www.sportsmenagainsthunger.org/>