

Submission
No 1

**INQUIRY INTO GAME AND FERAL ANIMAL
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (CONSERVATION
HUNTING) BILL 2025**

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As a shooter for almost 40 years, ex police officer of 12 years, growing up on a farm, avid outdoors person and avid conservationist I fully endorse this Bill.

I understand the fears people have about the use of suppressors by hunters however those fears are born out of misinformation and ignorance. Commonly labelled as silencers by media, suppressor is the more accurate term as they lower the sound not eliminate it. There are many good reasons for restricting suppressors (as opposed to banning) and few reasons to ban them. Suppressors reduce the 'muzzle report/blast' from a firearm as a result of the pressurised gas escaping the muzzle. The result of this is that the user of the firearm is subject to less noise and anything around is subject to less noise. As a shooter I have used many forms of hearing protection such as earmuffs and ear inserts/grommets. Grommets are very handy as they don't extrude from the face/head and so don't impair the use of the firearm allowing for better accuracy and handling. The downside is that they reduce the ambient sound of everything. As someone who wants to be as safe as possible, being able to hear what is happening around me is very important. The crunch of leaves near me when I am about to fire a shot allow me alerts me of someone moving and allows me to ensure they are not inadvertently putting themselves in an unsafe area I cannot see. Being able to hear people around me talking or telling me something is very important. Grommets and most earmuffs severely impair or eliminate the ability to do this. Recently electronic earmuffs have become available at varying cost and allow for the amplification of ambient sounds with directional microphones and come at some cost. These tools are quite beneficial however they often reduce sounds by about 24dB with the better earmuffs reducing in the vicinity of 32+ dB. The higher the dB reduction the better the ear protection provided, The issue is that earmuffs cover the ears and protrude from the side of the head. Whilst generally not an issue on construction sites they play havoc in the bush and whilst shooting. The earmuffs constantly catch unexpectedly on branches and the like causing the wearer to become unbalanced or the earmuffs being torn half off one's head requiring the wearer to crouch, lean their firearm on something whilst realigning the muffs. When actually trying to use a firearm wearing earmuffs most firearms have a cheek piece the face rests on and this is also where the earmuffs sit. This results in the shooter having to hold the firearm in an often awkward position to try align their eye with the sights. Modern earmuffs come in slimline designs which seek to mitigate the bulkiness issue of the earpieces impairing the handling of a firearm and being dislodged by branches etc however the issue remains but to a lesser degree. The ability to wear as little ear protection as possible results in better spatial awareness for a shooter, better weapon handling and better accuracy. The use of a suppressor objectively contributes to weapon and shooting safety.

As a conservation shooter my desire is to rid the countryside of as many feral pest animals as I can. Prior to recent rabbit control pathogens I experienced rabbits numbers that I have not seen in decades. During these times I predominantly used a .22LR rimfire for shooting rabbits with a variety of ammunition including supersonic and subsonic ammunition. Using supersonic ammunition extended the range of the rifle to allow longer shots on rabbits however with the advantage came a loud muzzle report which I found alerted all the surrounding rabbits and they would quickly hide in burrows or bushes. The advantage came with a significant disadvantage and made my efforts much less effective. My experience was that using subsonic ammunition reduced the muzzle blast from the rifle and the sound of the projectile as it travelled to the target without breaking the sound barrier. Though not silent the firearm was much quieter and more accurate. The upside was that the muzzle report did not spook animals and I was able to effectively target many more rabbits before they started to hide. Having used centrefire rifles in the Northern Territory shooting feral donkeys, horses, pigs and camels the 'spooking' affect of a centrefires muzzle report is significant. Travelling for many hundreds of metres (often more than a km) all surrounding animals would hear the shot and become alarmed, alert and often start moving away. This made the reduction of these animals less efficient and more difficult. Using a suppressor on a centrefire rifle would have allowed me to have more follow up shots before animals ran allowing me to remove more animals in that area and also not spook the animals in the surrounding area. The YouTube channel EDGE OF THE OUTBACK features many videos where he uses a centrefire rifle with a suppressor firing supersonic and subsonic rounds. The difference the suppressor makes in the removal of pests cannot be argued against.

Suppressors objectively make pest removal more effective and efficient.

I appreciate that there is a fear of criminals using suppressors on their firearms however to prohibit suppressors on this basis is simply asinine. To prohibit suppressors because criminals might use them? They are criminals, they don't care about whether an item is legal, illegal, prohibited or restricted. The firearm they'll be using will be unregistered, stolen, illegally modified, likely a combination. To prohibit the use of a suppressor by someone who has been thoroughly vetted by police because a criminal may use one, I believe, is an irrational fear based in ignorance. Suppressors

should not be legalised but should be available to anyone who has obtained a firearms licence and should be stored in the same manner as ammunition.

As a conservation hunter it is a constant frustration of mine to see the damage done by feral animals especially rabbits and pigs, The destruction they cause to vegetation and land through their digging is, i would argue, second to none. I have a lifelong desire to protect the environment from pests and a willingness to contribute my time and money to this endeavour. It is also a frustration of mine that I have been excluded from this in preference for airborne contract shooters. Having shot in the NT for 3 years I spoke with many landowners who had aerial shooters come in and conduct culling operations. Cruelty and lack of animal welfare was the common theme expressed and the necessity for farmers to 'finish off' wounded animals left by the contractors. Aerial shooters will often headshot animals with a semiautomatic centrefire rifles, which is undoubtedly the most effective and efficient method of firearm rapid pest removal, however the downside is that shooting an animal in the head and seeing it fall down is not to ensure a fatal shot. I have personally seen animals shot in the head with the bullet passing between the skull and skin knocking the animal unconscious before getting up a short time later wounded and bleeding. Farmers talking about donkeys "wandering around with half their head blown off" did not convince me that aerial shooting is the most ethical method of pest removal. I'm sure that some contractors go back and check the animals they have shot but there is little they can do from the air to check that the animal they have shot is actually deceased without delivering further shots into vital areas. Further shots contributes to further costs. Hunters on the ground do not have this issue. The ability to shoot from a stable platform and dedicate time to follow an animal should it be wounded is something aerial shooters do not have. Ground shooters are objectively less effective than aerial shooters however I believe ground shooters are objectively more humane in their destruction of pest animals.

Many areas of Australia have been made National Park, State Forest or Conservation area. Many of these areas are rugged and unsuitable for farming or habitation. Many have thick scrub with dense canopy making aerial shooting impossible or significantly hampered. This is where access on foot by ground shooters can make a huge difference. Accessing these areas where pest animals repopulate their numbers then invade the surrounding farmland is imperative to attempt to reduce the numbers of pest animals.

I understand the efficacy of baiting however I also understand collateral damage with these methods. Ground shooting is less effective than aerial shooting and less effective than baiting however if animal welfare is of any concern then it should be the method that is given significant weight if not preference. Further, the use of volunteers, overseen and organised by an educated body, reduces government spending, allocates resources effectively and efficiently and contributes to the economy of the areas between the volunteer and the targeted area.

I moved to Queensland before accessing the ability to hunt on public land in NSW and it is not an option in Queensland. On this topic I will comment that I am aware of a large community of hunters who operate in the state forests of SE Qld to reduce feral pig numbers. I do not endorse or engage in their actions but I understand it. They do so illegally because the Qld government does not recognise these hunters as the assets they are. I wish the Qld government would establish a body such as the existing game council and give these hunters the ability to operate legally and remove pests that the government currently pays to have removed or ignores in their negligence.

This Bill has given me significant drive to move back to NSW and I hope that it is supported and passed.