

Hi there,

I would like to make the following comments on behalf of the Shoalhaven Huntng Club (SHC). The SHC has a membership of 440 based in the Shoalhaven and Illawarra areas. Since the formation of the Cub in 1996, our members have been actively involved in feral animal control across south eastern NSW. We have developed and maintained relationships with over 40 landholders and one LandCare group and provide feral animal control services to these landholders free-of-charge.

We would like to make comments in relation to 4 matters.

### **1. Contribution of Recreational Hunters to feral animal control**

The contribution of recreational hunters to feral animal control goes largely unrecognised. Indeed, many people (Invasive Species bureaucrats and representatives of conservation organisations in particular) are usually openly dismissive of, and hostile towards the contribution of recreational hunters to feral animal control. This is both unhelpful and unproductive.

Such people often argue that recreational hunting of introduced species is ineffective (eg Booth (2009) Is recreational hunting effective for feral animal control? Essay Project, Invasive Species Council). However, this is essentially asking the wrong question. What should be asked is: Is recreational hunting any more or less effective than any other form of feral animal control? or Can recreational hunting make a useful contribution to feral animal control?

Obviously, recreational hunting **is** less effective in some circumstances - for example, when compared to Myxamatoxis and Calicivirus in rabbits. However, for species where a biological control is not available (which is the vast majority of species), recreational hunting can make a very strong contribution. An example includes the estimated 60,000 deer killed by recreational hunters in Victoria each year (<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/victorian-hunters-shoot-nearly-60000-feral-deer-in-201314-20150421-1mps8v.html>). Without recreational hunting, the "deer problem" would be completely overwhelming for farmers, land management agencies and even suburbanites. With recreational hunting, the "deer problem" is tolerable and manageable.

In regards to the effectiveness of recreational hunting in reducing animal populations, it is informative to observe the lengths that North American and European wildlife management authorities go to to limit the impact of recreational hunting on their wildlife populations. These include: closed seasons, bag limits, gear and technique restrictions, licensing systems, ballots, tagging systems, refuges etc etc. If recreational hunting had no impact upon animal populations, then all these provisions would be superfluous and

unnecessary. The Government could simply allow open slather hunting and the wildlife would prosper at the same time.

Paradoxically, conservation groups often argue against hunting of native species (ducks, kangaroos, wallabies etc) on the basis that hunting constitutes a threat to their survival. "They'll be hunted to extinction" they squeal. It is difficult to rationalise how recreational hunting is supposedly ineffective in reducing feral animal populations but simultaneously represents a dire threat to the survival of native species.

## **2. Government funding of feral animal control programs**

We frequently observe all levels of Government (Federal, State and local) providing funds for local or regional feral animal control programs (eg Illawarra Deer Management Program). None of these programs appear to be effective in the long term. Inevitably the money runs out after a few years, the program is mothballed and a few years later the feral animal population is back up to the same level.

This approach actually costs the community twice. Firstly when tax revenue is used to fund the program - that tax revenue is then unavailable for other Government programs. Secondly the opportunity cost associated with the recreational hunting opportunities that are foregone. If recreational hunting of the pest animal was encouraged in these areas, significant revenue for local communities would actually be generated.

Governments need to be more intelligent and discriminatory about which approaches they use to tackle the various different types of feral animals. Governments should encourage and promote recreational hunting of those species that are attractive to recreational hunters (deer, goats, pigs, rabbits, foxes etc) and thereby reap the socioeconomic benefits, but focus Government funded programs on species that have no recreational hunting value (European Wasps, Red Imported Fire Ants etc).

## **3. The role of Bounties**

Bounties have been a useful tool in the past and could be a useful tool again in the future. But again, many Feral Animal Control bureaucrats are dismissive and argue that bounties are ineffective.

If they are ineffective (which is debatable) it is because they have never really been implemented properly.

Bounties are too small and/or applied in just one of many jurisdictions where the pest animal occurs and/or are too onerous to collect.

The current Victorian fox bounty illustrates the point.

1. It only applies to Victoria. There are 2 issues with this. Firstly, foxes occur across all mainland states and can easily reinfest Victoria from NSW or SA. Secondly, the Victorian Government is probably paying for thousands of foxes shot in NSW and SA.
2. Each fox is only worth \$10.
3. To collect the bounty you need to remove the scalp and take it to a collection point.

Removing the scalp is a slow and messy process in contrast to removing the tail. Few hunters will go out and deliberately target foxes for just \$10 especially when you need to remove the scalp to claim the bounty **and** you need to present in person to claim the payment.

A National bounty of \$20 or \$30 for each tail, which could be posted to a single collection point, would in our opinion be sufficient incentive for tens of thousands of hunters to actively target foxes across their whole range. A \$50 bounty would make a huge difference to their numbers.

Instead of wasting money on localized fox poisoning campaigns, all the state, territory and federal governments need to cooperate and contribute to a nation wide program. Why not get a nationally

based hunter organisation such as the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia to run an Australia wide fox (and feral cat) bounty payment system?

#### **4. Constraints to effective feral animal control programs**

You often hear that for feral animal control programs to be effective, they need to be "co-ordinated". But is this true?

Was the extirpation of the Passenger Pigeon "co-ordinated"? No. Was the extirpation of the Tasmanian Tiger "co-ordinated"? No. What about the Bali Tiger, or the Mexican Grizzly Bear, or the Bluebuck? No, no and no.

It is not a lack of co-ordination that is making feral animal control ineffective. It is the presence of too many constraints:

- No hunting or trapping of feral animals in National Parks,
- No hunting or trapping of feral animals in Nature Reserves,
- No hunting or trapping of feral animals in Wilderness Areas,
- No hunting or trapping of feral animals in State Conservation Areas,
- No hunting or trapping of feral animals in Protected Water Catchments etc.
- No baiting or feeding of deer (to encourage them out the bush where they can be shot).
- No use of night vision equipment to shoot deer,
- No use of spotlights or torches to shoot deer.

Not being allowed to hunt feral animals in National Parks and other Conservation Reserves is a particular concern. By completely banning hunting and trapping in such places, the Government is effectively creating a multitude of feral animal sanctuaries across the landscape. Places where they can breed and multiply with impunity. How does that make sense?

Hunting in National Parks is inevitably perceived as being "too difficult" or "too risky". But the risks associated with hunting in National Parks and other reserves are grossly overstated. With a bit of imagination and will, hunting in National Parks could be safe and effective and economically advantageous to regional communities. Controls to ensure safety could include:

1. Restrict access to very experienced hunters such as those who have held a Firearms Licence for more than 20 years. This would dramatically reduce the risk of accidental shootings by inexperienced and overly "eager-to-make-a-kill" youngsters.
2. Require completion of a difficult accreditation course (not a simple multiple choice test),
3. Require completion of a realistic marksmanship course,
4. Spatial closures (no hunting around visitor centres, park features, walking tracks, car parks, along roads) to physically separate hunters and other park users to the greatest extent possible.
5. Temporal closures (no hunting on weekends, public holidays, school holidays etc) to reduce the possibility of interactions between hunters and other park users.
6. GPS enabled mapping and tracking to ensure that hunters don't stray into excluded areas.

National Park managers will never embrace recreational hunting as a control method whilst Governments continue to fund piecemeal culling programs whenever feral animal populations get out of control in particular parks.

If you would like to discuss any of the matters raised above, please feel free to contact me.

Regards

Allan Lugg



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