**HANSARD REVIEW**

[**GAME AND FERAL ANIMAL CONTROL**](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LA20130822036?open&refNavID=undefined)

**Discussion on Petition Signed by 10,000 or More Persons**

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Melanie Gibbons):** Order! Government Business having concluded, the House will now consider the petition signed by 10,000 or more persons. Before calling the member for Sydney, I wish to welcome members of the public who are in the gallery today. It is a relatively new procedure in the Legislative Assembly to discuss the subject of a petition with 10,000 or more signatures. This is an opportunity for members of the public to hear such matters discussed in Parliament; and I appreciate that you have a strong interest in the subject matter. I am aware that there are strongly held opposing views on the matter to be discussed today. One tenet of the parliamentary discussion is to allow those opposing views to be freely expressed, without interference. I therefore ask that those in the gallery refrain from clapping or distracting debate in any way, including verbally or visually. I ask the gentleman in the gallery not to proceed with putting on the vest, pursuant to my request that the debate not be distracted either verbally or visually. If you would resume your seat, that would be appreciated. Should there be any disruption of the orderly proceedings of the House from the members of the public, please understand that I will have no hesitation in suspending the sitting and clearing everyone from the gallery or asking that people be removed. I thank you for your understanding on that. I call the member for Sydney. Should members of the public disrupt the orderly proceedings of the House I will have no hesitation in having those individuals removed or suspending the sitting and clearing the public gallery.

**Mr ALEX GREENWICH** (Sydney) [4.31 p.m.]: I also welcome everyone to the public gallery to see the people's Parliament and democracy in action. This petition was signed by nearly 12,000 New South Wales residents, calling on the Government to overturn legislation regarding recreational hunting in national parks. It represents one of the strongest community campaigns in recent years. The petition was created by the National Parks Association of New South Wales and its aims are supported by the major environment groups and animal protection groups. I would like to highlight the work of Kevin Evans and Justin McKee—who are in the gallery—and also thank the staff of the Minister for the Environment for the work they have done.

There is widespread condemnation of recreational hunting in national parks. National parks are set aside for the long-term protection of our diminishing biodiversity. Parks offer peace and quiet, fresh air, visual beauty and the opportunity to learn about native flora and fauna. People of all ages, including families and visitors from across the country and the globe, come to enjoy the unique national parks that New South Wales has to offer. They are seen as safe places and it is mindboggling that the Government has entertained the idea of allowing recreational hunters to bring guns, bows and arrows, and black powder weapons into these natural escape havens to kill animals on their own terms.

There is no question that this activity places park visitors and staff at risk of harm. Internal Government reports rate the threat of death or injury as high, and confrontation incidents as high to medium. Sufficient supervision of thousands of hunters roaming about large tracts of land, as was initially proposed, will never be possible. The aim of hunters is not the protection of our biodiversity or the peaceful enjoyment of national parks; it is to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sport of hunting. Recreational hunters enjoy killing animals for sport. There are known cases of recreational hunters releasing introduced species into the wild in order to maintain game population for future hunting.

There is no evidence that recreational hunting is an effective way to manage introduced species. Recreational hunting is an ad hoc method of pest control. It does not involve the extensive consideration of proper, scientific, introduced species management plans. Eradication of populations across a widespread area is not possible through uncontrolled, unplanned, random killing. Internal Government reports reveal that amateurs hunting in national parks would put native animals at risk of being maimed or accidentally killed. There are already many known cases of this happening in State forests. I welcome the Government's recent changes to limit the program to a three-year trial in 12 national parks within which all pest control programs, including hunting, will be controlled, managed and under terms set by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Recreational hunters should not protest. They will be able to apply to join National Parks and Wildlife Service professionals on dedicated hunting operations.

We now need a review of the Game Control Act to reflect the newly imposed restrictions so that they remain in the future and also apply to State forests. Concern exists about the way target animals are treated in pest control programs. Introduced species do not feel less pain because they have been labelled pests. Hunters do not always kill with a single shot. Some animals escape and suffer a slow and painful death, and others are shot repeatedly. Hunting is cruel. I am also concerned about other forms of pest control, including the use of Pindone and 1080, which cause immense suffering to animals. The funds the Government will invest in hunting programs in our national parks should be used to develop a compassionate solution to introduced species. Investment should be directed to developing humane pest management programs, such as fertility control and trap, de-sex and return. These strategies work. They are humane and should be implemented. We need to base pest management decisions on peer-reviewed, measurable science. There is no point engaging programs that have no effect on feral animal populations over time.

Members who support recreational hunting often cite the numbers of feral pigs, foxes, deer and goats destroyed by hunters but such figures are meaningless. If there is no difference in overall population over time, the program is mere cruelty and cannot be justified. The changes to the Game Control Act must ensure that amateur hunters and anyone under 18 cannot be granted permission to hunt on public lands in this State. With the Game Council now dissolved, funds previously dedicated to its involvement with controlling introduced species should be transferred to the National Parks and Wildlife Service to manage national parks and wilderness areas and for the wider protection of native flora and fauna. Funds allocated to the NSW Police Force to crack down on illegal hunting activity should remain for that purpose and be included in future budgets. Prior to the last election the Government promised not to support recreational hunting in national parks and this cruel, ineffective and unpopular policy should never be proposed again. I congratulate everyone involved in this campaign on their strong and concerted efforts that have led to the Government changing and improving its approach to feral animal control.

**Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON** (Burrinjuck—Minister for Primary Industries, and Minister for Small Business) [4.36 p.m.]: The New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government is acutely aware of the need for effective pest animal control on public lands in New South Wales. The overall direct economic impact of pest animals in New South Wales has been conservatively estimated at $740 million annually. To tackle this problem at its core, we need better coordination of government agencies and the use of all available resources, including professional and volunteer pest management service providers. The volunteer hunting program that started operating in State forests in March 2006 achieved significant outcomes. There are almost 20,000 game hunting licence holders, who collectively have spent more than 84,500 days contributing to pest management in up to 400 of our State forests. They have removed almost 95,000 game and feral animals, such as feral pigs and goats, wild dogs, foxes and rabbits. That effort amounted to a major reduction in the impact on biodiversity, a major reduction in the consumption by introduced species of native fauna and flora, and a major reduction in the population of feral animals impacting on farmers and landholders who adjoin State forests.

The Minister for the Environment has announced a program for the introduction of supplementary pest control in the State's national parks. The program was developed following a rigorous risk assessment process and expert advice. The National Parks and Wildlife Service [NPWS] will regulate and manage the supplementary pest control program. New measures will ensure that volunteers are held to a standard equivalent to the one that applies to National Parks and Wildlife Service staff and contractors, who already undertake pest control operations on the park estate at significant cost. The supplementary pest control program will be similar in principle to hazard reduction operations, which use volunteers with a high level of training and competency. The Rural Fire Service—with its volunteers—is renowned as an effective, proactive and skilled organisation that delivers a highly valued service to the community and to the landscape. A number of controls, coupled with planning and direction by National Parks and Wildlife Service staff, will enable effective management of pest animals in national parks, with safety paramount in the design of the program.

The pest control program will augment existing pest control programs operating throughout the State under the direction of experienced National Parks and Wildlife Service staff. Feral animals are already culled in national parks using trapping, baiting and shooting. I feel sure that the proponents of the petition would not dispute that feral animal control is necessary in national parks. This new program will simply give the National Park and Wildlife Service additional volunteer resources to ensure that we are doing all we can to remove pest animals from our landscape. The Government must achieve the optimal use of all available resources to control feral animals. A range of risk-management measures is in place: no volunteer can carry a firearm in a national park unless they are participating in a planned pest control program, scheduled and managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service; no person under 18 is allowed to participate in the program; and only firearms equivalent to those used in National Parks and Wildlife Service operations will be permitted. The use of bows and arrows, and black powder muskets is forbidden. Initially, only 12 parks or reserves will be part of the program.

A review and report back to government will be undertaken before any further rollout of the program. The program may be made available in up to 75 of the State's national parks or reserves, which is less than 10 per cent of the total number of parks in New South Wales. The majority of the parks involved in the trial are in the State's west and the program will not occur in any wilderness, World Heritage or metropolitan area. As with existing pest control operations, these activities will be planned and announced at least four weeks in advance. Any area where a pest control operation is to be undertaken will be closed to visitors during the period of the operation, with appropriate signage and road closures in place. The program will not occur during school holidays. It is expected to commence in some parks from October this year. These measures—and those to be introduced after the review of the current risk assessment for all State Forests and two Crown Lands areas—will provide a more coordinated approach for the management of pest animals in New South Wales.

**Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT** (Marrickville) [4.41 p.m.]: I support this petition, and I congratulate the member for Sydney on bringing this important issue to the attention of the House today. I acknowledge all those people who have been involved in collecting signatures and all the people who are in the public gallery today. The O'Farrell Government's decision to allow hunting in national parks has caused enormous concern right across New South Wales, as is clearly demonstrated by this petition that is signed by 12,000 people. This is a huge issue in my electorate of Marrickville. Many constituents have phoned me, emailed me or met with me to express their concern and their anger that the O'Farrell Government could walk away from the very clear commitment that it made to the people of New South Wales that there would be no hunting in national parks in in this State. In fact, such was the strength of feeling in my electorate that many people turned up on a very cold May evening to a public meeting that I held to protest against this decision.

New South Wales has a national park estate that is the envy of the rest of Australia. Indeed, it is the envy of the rest of the world. We have more than 850 national parks and reserves, comprising 6.8 million hectares, covering a vast array of landscapes and protecting our precious native flora and fauna. These areas exist for the purpose of nature conservation, and to provide opportunities for appropriate recreational activities. They are unique and special areas and are valued enormously by the people of New South Wales. The Government's decision to allow hunting in national parks is one that I deplore on environmental grounds, on scientific grounds and, most importantly, on safety grounds.

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Melanie Gibbons):** Order! The member for Marrickville has the call.

**Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT:** Government members can interject but we all know that there is one reason—and one reason only—the Government has allowed hunting in national parks. It is because those opposite did a deal with the Shooters and Fishers Party so that the Government could pass its electricity privatisation bill. The Premier has made it absolutely clear; he has no shame about that. But we also know that any initiative that is a result of a political deal rather than proper evidence-based policymaking is bound to be flawed—and this initiative is no different. The Government has had to twist into contortions in order to satisfy the deal it made with the Shooters and Fishers Party. A review of the Game Council NSW earlier this year led to its abolition. This was the body that pushed for amateur hunting to occur in our national parks. It was the body that was supposed to oversee amateur hunting in our national parks. Despite this body being abolished, the Government is proceeding with this very flawed policy. This policy is going to have a huge detrimental impact on our national parks. People will be afraid to visit our national parks. They will be scared for their safety. The Government must listen to the people of New South Wales and reverse this terrible decision.

**Mr TROY GRANT** (Dubbo—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.44 p.m.]: In speaking to the petition before the House, I inform those in the gallery that I spent 22 years in the police force before entering this place. In that occupation I dealt with facts and evidence, which is crucial to establishing what is occurring as opposed to what is alleged to be occurring across our community. On that premise, let us be quite clear: The shooting of pest animals already occurs in national parks. It occurred under the guidance of the Labor Party. The National Parks and Wildlife Service officers already use firearms to control pest species in a coordinated and well-planned program. They do it safely and with the sole intention of reducing the great harm that pest animals do to our national parks and reserves and adjoining land by destroying native habitats, flora and fauna.

The new supplementary pest control program is an extension of this. The Minister for the Environment recently announced the details of the new program in New South Wales national parks, giving the National Parks and Wildlife Service access to additional volunteer resources to assist in conducting pest control programs. I repeat: These programs already exist. These volunteers will be required to have high-level training and undergo competency testing in safe firearms handling and shooting proficiency—I underwent similar training in my policing career so I understand it well—which will be equivalent to the training undertaken by current National Parks and Wildlife Service staff. The pest control program will simply help the National Parks and Wildlife Service extend its existing pest control within national parks and reserves. There will be other cooperative programs with neighbours to protect native species and agriculture from the terrible impacts of pest animals. The member for Sydney talks about that issue but he does not provide the facts.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service will continue to initiate, plan and direct all pest control activities within these parks. It will ensure that the programs are safe and that they achieve the aim of reducing the pest animal burden on our lands—and it is a significant burden. The program is part of the Government's plan to ensure the effective and sound management of pest animals in New South Wales—and we are starting to reach crisis point in that regard. The Minister for Primary Industries, who spoke a short while ago, announced recently that the Government would adopt the key recommendations of the "Governance Review of the Game Council of NSW" report by Mr Steve Dunn. The Government has suspended hunting in all 400 State forests and two Crown land areas pending the transfer of functions and the outcome of the review of the current risk assessment, which is being conducted as a result of the Dunn report. The experience to date of licensed, responsible hunting on declared public lands shows that the vast majority of hunters have complied with the law when hunting. The Government expects that good behaviour to continue. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr JAMIE PARKER** (Balmain) [4.47 p.m.], by leave: I support the thousands of people who signed the petition opposing hunting in national parks and the many spirited grassroots campaigners who made their voices heard on this issue. Make no mistake, it was this activism and campaigning that helped us achieve a significant victory in this campaign. The O'Farrell Government was embarrassed—it was convinced by the evidence—into abolishing the pro-gun, pro-hunting Game Council NSW, suspending amateur hunting in State forests and ending the idea of unrestricted amateur hunting in national parks. That decision followed a decade-long campaign by many including environment groups, animal welfare organisations and local campaigners who have signed this petition. It was a deal—which we campaigned against—with the gun lobby and the former, Labor Government, which opened up State forests for amateur recreational hunting.

This Government proposes to take it further in another deal to extend hunting to national parks. The Government's own risk assessment said that hunting in national parks would bring significant risk of injury and death. The Dunn report into the governance of the Game Council NSW supported what the Greens and other campaigners have been saying: The Game Council NSW was basically a public relations machine for hunters and shooters, and was failing in its obligations as a publicly funded body to be transparent, accountable and effective. The abolition of the Game Council NSW is therefore a significant step, but this policy still needs new work when it comes to viewing feral pest control as a rigorous scientific and humane program. I am sure that all members in this House agree that pests are a major issue, which needs to be dealt with. I highlight the important work of people like Justin McKee and Kevin Evans from the National Parks Association, who have helped make this day a success.

A continuing conflict of interest exists between amateur hunters who want to ensure a good crop of animals—they want feral animals—and public sector land managers. I acknowledge the positive changes that the Government has made to this policy since this petition was signed. It now requires that shooters demonstrate exactly the same level of skill and training that the National Parks and Wildlife Service rangers have, and only operate as part of targeted and evidence based pest control programs. That is the point we have consistently argued: We need targeted and evidence-based pest control programs. Letting weekend warriors shoot up national parks is not a pest control program. The Government has taken steps to address this, and I acknowledge that. Unlike what some in the Game Council NSW and the Shooters and Fishers Party wanted, there will be no unsupervised hunting, no children allowed to hunt, and no hunting with bows, knives or dogs. This is an important step, but it still views killing as sport.

There are gun lobbyists who want to open national parks to unsupervised recreational hunters. We Greens will be maintaining pressure on the Government to completely ban unsupervised amateur hunting on public land in New South Wales and redirect what was the budget of the Game Council NSW to professional pest control programs and further research into humane pest control. The Government will soon begin trials, and we will be keeping a very close eye on that. I acknowledge the steps the Government has taken. I congratulate all of those people who have signed this petition. It was the effort of many people who are sitting in the gallery today that helped make legislation that is better for the environment and which helps control pest animals. They also helped ensure that the legislation reflects the true will of the people in our community.

**Mr JOHN WILLIAMS** (Murray-Darling) [4.50 p.m.], by leave: This is truly democracy at work. There are 10,000 signatures. I ask the 10,000 people who have signed this petition: Have you been to the national parks in question? Have you looked at the conditions? Have you seen the feral animals that are in those national parks? Have you spoken to adjoining property holders? Have you seen the impact of feral animals on some of the farming regions? Do you know, first-hand, how the program will work?

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Melanie Gibbons):** Order! The member for Murray-Darling does not need the assistance of Government members.

**Mr JOHN WILLIAMS:** I appreciate the honesty of the member for Balmain: he cleared up the myth and innuendo attached to the Government's decision to allow shooters in national parks. He said that the Government has taken responsible direction because shooters will be supervised. I have not heard of an incident of someone being maimed, injured or killed in a State forest because of shooters. New South Wales has 180,000 registered shooters. I spend a deal of time with members of the Shooters and Fishers Party in my electorate; they are not rednecks. They are responsible people. They respect the right to have a firearm and they also respect the laws. Many people, including me, would not participate in that hobby but, fortunately, shooters can engage in their recreation. Knowing how the National Parks and Wildlife Service administers its business, I assure the House that shooters will not be able to run wild and do as the member for Sydney said. Currently, shooting is permitted in national parks. Shooters are contracted by the National Parks and Wildlife Service to shoot feral animals, which they do from within helicopters, not from the ground. Animals they shoot do not die instantly as we would like; they are maimed and left to die. That is what happens now. It is not part of a scare campaign. Go and see what is happening in the national parks before making a decision from a concrete jungle.

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Melanie Gibbons):** Order! I thank those in the gallery for the way they listened to the debate.

**Discussion concluded.**