

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land

Bright — 19 October 2016

Members

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Mr Bill Tilley

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Mr Neil McCarthy, chief executive officer, and

Mr Lachlan Campbell, regional landcare facilitator – agriculture – kiewa, North East Catchment Management Authority.

The CHAIR — Welcome to Mr Lachlan Campbell and Mr Neil McCarthy. Thank you for coming today to present to the hearing. Just before we start, there are a couple of formalities to go through. The hearing today is being recorded, and you will get a copy of the transcript so that you can check it for accuracy — but of course the Hansard transcript is always very accurate. Anything you say in the hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege, but that may not be the case outside the hearing.

I will pass it over to you. Perhaps if you could give a bit of a background of your involvement in this issue to start with. I see that you have a presentation. About 5 or 10 minutes we are looking for, so that we can ask you lots of questions.

Mr McCARTHY — I am Neil McCarthy, CEO of the North East Catchment Management Authority. I actually have a long background in environmental management. I was the general manager of Parks Victoria for a long time and have done a lot of things nationally and internationally in natural resource management.

Mr CAMPBELL — Lachlan Campbell. I am a catchment coordinator with the North East CMA. I look after land also, so I work with farmers and so forth. Part of that discussion is that Neil has instructed me to undertake some work with the community around deer and understanding the issues they have.

Visual presentation.

Mr McCARTHY — We will start our presentation. Our organisation is a catchment management authority. We are responsible effectively under the CALP act to bring private and public land managers and community together to actually create integrated catchment management, and we do that through the regional catchment strategy that was approved in 2013. We have a long-term objective regarding that. Our land is roughly about 45 per cent freehold and 55 per cent public land, with extreme interface issues between those two tenures, but I think that is well known to local members — extremely well. We actually do produce about 38 per cent of the Murray-Darling Basin water, so very significant economic value for Australia and really important in a Victorian sense as well.

I will just mention here — you do know the legislation extremely well — that the legislation does talk about our role as facilitating and coordinating to have integrated catchment management. So in our role we do not actually own anything. We do not have really direct responsibility for much, except for some waterway health management issues. Our role is to actually bring parties together, to actually get them to work together. That will be a bit of the emphasis of our presentation, using the deer as the example.

Our mission does actually stress in the final component achieving community-led practice change. That brings us back to the act in terms of representing the views of the community and actually what the community wishes to achieve to get a productive landscape, in both an environmental and agricultural sense. So our role is quite unique.

In the deer experience, this is where catchment management authorities especially can play a really big role. It is unique and the deer one actually highlights that. Of the government entities, very few of them have that overarching ability to bring different players together, especially if you have different views, but also to have the reach out into the community as well and with a lot of significant community groups, as you can see by the logos on our partnership group. It goes from VicPol right through to sporting shooters, the Australian Deer Association and universities and state government entities as well. That is a really significant role that we play.

Regarding deer as a dilemma for the north-east, it was recognised in our regional catchment strategy. It was what the community voiced back in 2013. They have followed that up with us significantly over the years, and we decided as an entity that we probably should start this dialogue out there in the community. One of our key partners, being the Upper Murray Landcare group, proposed actually running a forum, and that is where we started. We ended up running a range of forums with our partners across the whole region. I will not go into much detail because you might have questions about this, but it actually did bring all our partners into the room. It enabled all our partners to express what they knew of the issue and also the community to express their concerns.

The first one, which was the one at Cudgewa in the Upper Murray, was the largest community gathering in NRM since 2004 when there was a drought resilience workshop. That was a big event for the community, which signifies how significant deer has become in that area. We have covered all of our patch, as you can see by the table.

Our role is to try to get the right information on the table but also to enable communities to express their concerns. I am not going to go through each one of these. A number of you have actually seen them before. The community expressed a range of issues around deer per se, around productivity and around environmental impacts. A lot of these you have probably heard about from other submissions et cetera, in terms of economic loss, modelling or the population explosion of deer, right through to environmental impacts both in parks and right through to urban areas as well.

The community also expressed a whole lot of social issues. Invasive animals are not just the animals and their impact on the environment and agricultural productivity. There are always a lot of social issues, especially around spotlighting and how people behave as well, right through to the potential for serious car accidents. They did raise other topics as well, from legislation impediments right through to market-based deer management concepts. They also identified a whole range of opportunities. I am just stressing that part of our role is actually to get the conversation going and to get the information out there and the right facts, but then to actually allow people to express the things they are struggling with.

The next three slides just highlight some of the things that have come out of this process that become enabling for communities to actually move forward. The Upper Murray Landcare Network is at the forefront as a social community group. They have produced a deer pack. That deer pack contains a lot of factual information, from guides for landowners in terms of how they might engage with, let us say, the Sporting Shooters Association to run a control program that is organised and well exercised, right through to, as an example, coming up with a thing about Rural Watch. Farmers can actually put those signs up to encourage people to dial in to the appropriate point if they have got a complaint or a concern.

The Upper Murray Landcare Network have done a whole range of other things. They are doing a trial in the Pheasant Creek area. There is a deer exclusion trial that is being funded from a range of government sources. They have developed, as I have said, the deer information pack. They have developed this Rural Watch group. They have produced farm signs as well, and they have also conducted two meetings, which have involved about 140 people.

The next example that is developing in the north-east is a concept around what we could call deer tourism, in the sense of the economic opportunities, people actually hosting hunters to undertake deer control programs, but they effectively pay for the right for that.

Towong shire have actually been facilitating some of those conversations. That is really in its infancy. It is quite an interesting area — I think it has been raised — regarding the tourism potential. It would be a real challenge exploring that in a larger sense.

The last one — which you have heard a fair bit about, and Parks Victoria probably have, I assume, submitted a submission regarding some of their control programs — is the Victorian Alpine National Park deer control trial. We provide substantial funding for that program through a commonwealth-funded program with two other CMAs and with Parks Victoria as well. I will not spend much time on that.

Apart from the community meetings, we have also made sure that at a regional level we brought all the partners together, especially the government departments, but also the community. We run what is called the Hume regional deer round table. It really is to provide that extra conduit back to the government from the community. It is about listening to the community through those forums, bringing that back and making sure there is still a community in those forums, and also to get much more high-level coordination and discussion happening.

Those discussions have ranged from a whole range of things, such as the additional opportunities. Those additional opportunities have ranged from the use of professional hunters or coordinated volunteers in terms of programs, the concept of grants to protect specific public or private assets, landholders potentially

developing exclusivity agreements for hunting rights — which would be more around commercial tourism — and the value-adding of deer carcass. We actually had a presentation — because there is a rendering plant in the north-east — about how that might actually be able to be used. To actually process carcasses, it does not actually take it directly into the food chain in Australia, so there is an opportunity there. And obviously training improvements, which the ADA and sporting shooters have suggested in terms of possible improvements in that area. The other areas of opportunity are obviously around research. There have been some interesting social research and deer research in terms of its environmental impacts that have been undertaken. That is just a brief overview of our role, what we have been trying to do and what we have been trying to facilitate.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that, and thanks for coming in. I have just a couple of smaller questions first. The consultation forums, is that just a one-off? Often you have these things, and then a bit of activity happens and then that is the end of it. Is there a way of continuing the momentum and trying to get some through some of the issues?

Mr McCARTHY — Yes, there are a number of ways. Our organisation has been trying to have regular what we call catchment conversations with the community as a way of reinforcing different developments and ideas that are coming through. That is quite difficult in the sense that communities are extremely busy, and also they get disrupted. Right now with the floods, people's focus is actually on flood and flood recovery, so our conversations are skewed that way, but we are trying to have more regular conversations. We do rely on our community-based groups, be it a Landcare group or TAFCO — they are a supply company up here that provide rural supplies — and we use those groups to actually keep those conversations going.

The CHAIR — In terms of the actual suggestions that are made, legislative amendments, for example. How do you get from the ideas? You might be able to give us a bit of help on that.

Mr McCARTHY — That is the main purpose of the Hume regional forum, because it is a joint forum between the North East Catchment Management Authority and DELWP. We jointly chair it, and that is a conduit to keep some of these conversations alive. That meets twice each year. The intent is actually to try to keep that going to keep the momentum moving.

The CHAIR — We have heard from the professional pest control organisation — I cannot quite remember the name, but you know who I am talking about, I think. There did not seem to be any representatives from there. One of their concerns when they came to us earlier for an earlier presentation was that they were losing work as a result of some of the recreational hunter programs. Is there a role for them, do you think, or is there a reason why they were not involved in the consultation processes?

Mr McCARTHY — Yes, there is a role. There is a role for everyone, and in fact our model is about trying to get everyone into the room. When we actually started the first forum in the Upper Murray we did not actually have everyone in the room — we basically had the Game Management Authority, Parks Victoria, ourselves and VicPol there. By the time we got to Whitfield we had actually collected a lot more interested parties, because people had not actually ever connected with the issue et cetera. So we would welcome them to contact us to actually join that conversation.

In terms of actual physical operations on the ground, it will still be the responsibility of the farmer or of a land manager in terms of the best model. We will encourage them to look at all possible models to actually make it work best.

Mr McCURDY — Neil, it sounds like we are nearly doubling up on some of the information that we are getting here. Are you making recommendations to the government when you have completed? If so, will we get access to that? It would be very useful information, because the type of things you are collecting is exactly what we are doing — it is the same thing, moving around communities.

Mr McCARTHY — The role of the CMA is to give advice to the ministers and give advice on what we are hearing from communities. We intend to do that. We will probably do that through the regional forum-based process, and all of that is reasonably public in the sense that we are willing to share all of that,

because it has been an open process so far. We do recognise the limitations of the existing legislation and policy and those frameworks, and some of those things take a long time to actually work through.

Mr McCURDY — Those recommendations would be very valuable to us to assist us as we get into the business end of that as well. Lachlan, from what you are hearing around the meetings and that, if we are going to say on a scale of 1 to 10 the level of interest in deer and the invasive species, particularly deer, on roads and property, where does it sit?

Mr CAMPBELL — It is exponential growth, let me tell you. It is like Paul Keating's J-curve. There is incredible interest. Twelve months ago I think you would have struggled to get much attention at these meetings. As you have seen, we have had pretty good coverage and great attendance. Anecdotally there is a great groundswell out there around deer. Perhaps if you looked to rabbits 100 years ago, people cannot understand how such a large animal has grown in population and is affecting their businesses. Economically it is really impacting how farmers undertake their works. They are spending precious time and resources building capital assets to protect their enterprises or undertake eradication programs.

It is quite a broad interest; it is not just farmers. We had Wodonga council in about a month ago. They are going to stop all urban plantings because they are getting hammered in Wodonga now. We think it is a parks and public space, public-private interface problem, but it is broader than that. I guess that is why we are getting a broader slice of the community who are putting their hand up and wanting to undertake some works.

Mr McCURDY — So it is as bad as what we have been hearing as well. There is a lot of interest because it is just getting out of hand.

Mr CAMPBELL — That is right, and I think the community feel a bit helpless. While the recreational shooters are doing a great job — 60 000 deer is to be commended — the population is far greater than that and than it appears.

Mr McCURDY — Or growing at a rate greater than that. I think it is growing at a rate greater than that.

Mr CAMPBELL — Right. Anecdotally people would suggest that the shooters are not keeping up with the population growth.

Mr TILLEY — I suppose we can just continue with the conversation. Tim took the words out of my mouth about the recommendations from the work you are doing in this space. Just in the interim, what sort of short-term legislative changes would be required? What sort of legislative changes in the short term need to be looked at?

Mr McCARTHY — So if we stuck to the conversation around the farm agricultural landscape component rather than the public land domain — because in the public land domain, as you have heard, processing or shifting carcasses is a real dilemma — on a family farm land-type landscape being able to actually process carcasses would actually help. We would welcome being a pilot. It is very similar to the kangaroo harvesting pilot that has been going on. That pilot does not actually have to enter the food chain given that we have got a rendering plant, and there have been some discussions around that. Through that pilot you would be able to test the viability. That does actually need probably some coordinated programs with farmers — I would suggest with the Sporting Shooters, the ADA and a few others — to actually get the right volume to make it work, because it will be volume-based processing chain dilemma.

That is one item. The legislation does not allow for that. I do not know if there is a simple fix. We know that it is always a bit more complex when it comes to legislation. That is one example where we would be saying that is what we are hearing from the community. We believe it is probably possible. It might be proven that the volume is not there. I suspect once you can actually set it up people will utilise those processes. They are the sorts of recommendations we are likely to make. An example is that we are looking for things that enable people to solve problems but recognise that they are not the total solution, because you actually need a whole range of solutions.

Mr CAMPBELL — Can I just add to that? I think it is recognised that a market-based solution might help the problem. As Neil intimated there, Oztek industries at Barnawartha, a rendering plant, have indicated they have had interest from Germany for rendered product meal that comes out of that plant and that they are willing to pay a premium for that product. Then we have been working with the knackery, if you like — the people who go and pick up the dead animals — and they are going up the valley pretty much every day. We have established the supply chain there and, as Neil said, it would be lovely to set up a pilot program. I think our community would be ready for that sort of opportunity. We are talking jobs, talking exports and talking the potential to value-add to a product that has potentially no value at present. That is certainly something. The community is really concerned about the waste of carcasses. It is raised at every meeting, and they hate to see waste. I think farmers generally hate to see waste, so this potentially is one way that the whole supply chain could be funded.

Mr TILLEY — So, on that, the challenges with product from deer is the lack of tallow in rendering. So you are talking about a general knackery blending it with other types — —

Mr CAMPBELL — This particular product is just pure deer meal. They are not after the tallow, they are just after the meal, the resulting product. We have engaged with them, and they have spoken at our round table. This is Oztek industries. They are keen to be in.

Mr TILLEY — That is good to hear. The inquiry is not only on deer. Some of the other work you are doing with other invasive species, whether it is horse, dog, all those things — could we just get a bit of conversation around that?

Mr McCARTHY — I might just mention a couple. We have been pursuing a similar model with rabbits. We have been a bit focused on what is called the Springhurst round table. It is the same basic model of getting the right people around the table. Rabbits obviously is a long-term issue that has had a really interesting history in Australia and some really interesting biocontrol as well. Given it is a long-run issue, it took us a while to actually get the people in the room. Springhurst involves land managers — DEDJTR, DELWP, Parks Victoria — the main entities that control the freeway and the rail track as well, as well as the local community. That has been in operation for two years. That has been working quite well now. It is a lot of effort to actually get them in the room, but it is a model that actually gets runs on the board recognising everyone's limitations.

So it is very similar to deer. Deer has got a lot more emphasis behind it at present, and it is new. The rabbit one is a long-term one for which we would be looking for a lot more focused resourcing to make happen. We have been very successful in terms of invasive plants in terms of the black berry action group model. That really is a north-east invention, and it has been very successful and has been adopted across Victoria. I think the rabbit model is basically heading down the same track as well.

Mr TILLEY — That has been included with your submission for this inquiry?

Mr McCARTHY — Yes.

Mr CAMPBELL — Just to add to that, it is a quite interesting social concept, I think: when the community is prepared to recognise that a problem is equally theirs as it is others'. As I say, it is almost a tipping point. They come to the realisation that the problem is theirs as well as others', and they want to get around and have a conversation about the issue.

Mr TILLEY — I suppose that one of the parts of it is that it has taken a while to roll up, particularly with deer — getting that communication through to the community, because it is quite diverse. Whether you are down at the Mitta Valley or the Tallangatta Valley, the community can be quite diverse.

Mr McCARTHY — I would emphasise the dilemma that state government entities that have jurisdictional control face, be it public land, or a functional control, be it policy on rabbits et cetera. They will always struggle to be able to come from a point of view of the community and actually bring people together. I know from practice that Parks Victoria has struggled to work outside their boundaries. They find it very difficult and find it very uncomfortable, but we are probably the mechanism that enables

people to come to the table, and our job is to try and do that. Sometimes it is extremely uncomfortable because people have history. But once you get past that point and you start working together, people can actually see it working. The challenge will be once we leave the room, can they actually maintain their partnerships? I think that is one of the biggest challenges in front of us.

Mr TILLEY — On a final note, when you talk about the finite resources, what the CMA has been trying to achieve with addressing invasive species — how much is it hitting the budget, the bottom line, of the organisation?

Mr McCARTHY — In terms of our funding, we get a very significant amount of funding from the commonwealth for what are called both sustainable environmental and sustainable ag programs. That gives us a certain degree of capacity in certain areas, but not as extensive as we would like. We have a very significant waterways program that gives us capacity, especially up in this area. Broome is an example, because they generally do occur along waterways and across significant areas.

The real challenge is not just for our organisation, it is for the whole community — actually getting the right partnerships and the right funding across all those partners. That can be from a range of groups, from local government right through to state and commonwealth funding. That alignment really needs to occur to leverage funds a lot better. Deer is a classic example — we are not going to solve the deer problem in terms of removing deer completely. It is probably not even appropriate, given that we have a lot of people who have it as a recreational sport, but to have deer under control is a huge issue. So we have to innovate, and in that, funding is important and funding to create innovation is important. I think Tim and Bill know that it is one of the areas that we specialise in.

The virtual fence concept, which is about actually managing the dilemmas of floods and farmers having their fences disappear, if we can crack that nut we have solved a real big cost burden for farmers, which is good for the state and good for Australia as well. So it might not be about the total quantum, but it might be about really good funding for the right things. We would stress that the community engagement has probably been really cathartic for the north-east in actually moving forward on issues like deer or the rabbits at Springhurst.

Mr CAMPBELL — Can I just go back a point? I am not sure if it was Bronwyn's question, 'How do you keep the community motivated about issues?'. I think it is really around community leadership. One of our themes is trying to support community leadership and support those people who are willing to put their hand up to undertake tasks. I cannot speak highly enough of investing in leadership in rural communities. It is critical. Deer is just another scenario where we need strong leadership. Part of our role is supporting those people.

Mr McCARTHY — Can I actually stress that a little bit more? We are effectively the main NRM body in Australia that is funding a community leadership program for environmental Landcare through the Alpine Valleys Community Leadership Program. We have run it for three years now, and we are looking to expand that into a multiyear and multidimensional program.

Mr TILLEY — That is getting the private sector involved more, unlike past experience when it was the public sector?

Mr McCARTHY — Yes.

Mr CAMPBELL — Giving people skills and experiences.

Mr McCARTHY — Community leadership.

Mr CAMPBELL — Community leadership, yes — it is critical.

Mr TILLEY — In my view it needs a lot more private sector people involved, unlike in past history.

Mr CAMPBELL — That is a tricky game, let me say. We need to offer a product that they want to put their time into, so you need to design it well.

Mr YOUNG — Thanks, guys, for coming in. It has been pretty good hearing from you. There are some interesting points there. I have got a couple of quick questions. Whilst Bill was talking about other animals that are involved in this, cats are something that are not brought up by government agencies. Can you explain to us why and what is happening in the space of cats?

Mr McCARTHY — Yes. It is recognised in Australia that cats are a significant dilemma, especially for conservation management. Victoria has had a long history with cats in terms of the Domestic Animal Act back in the 1980s, and I had the pleasure of being in front of a parliamentary committee regarding domestic animals back then.

The CHAIR — Did anything come out of it?

Mr McCARTHY — Yes, there were some really significant improvements back then that were very significant for public land management in terms of the Dandenongs and the save the lyrebird program back then. There is a big interest in cats. There are a number of control mechanisms that are subject to legislation that cannot be utilised in Victoria, and there should be a process of making sure that they are actually examined appropriately. The commonwealth government has a major focus.

Cats as a population are highly dispersed. Therefore they are not as easy to control and focus on et cetera. They are very dissimilar to goats, as an example. You can use sentinel goats in a control program or you can control water sources, and you can actually then manage the goat population through those sorts of techniques. With cats you basically have none of those options, so the biocontrol-type options are things that people are very interested in. The Mallee CMA are heavily looking into that on behalf of CMAs in Victoria, and that is part of the program that we run down the Murray corridor. We would be very interested up here when we get the right control mechanisms.

Mr YOUNG — Are there any control mechanisms that would be good to use that are not available because of those inhibiting pieces of legislation?

Mr McCARTHY — I am probably not the best person to ask regarding that. I think there are a range of experts that might be able to express that. I would say one of the emerging ones for us that might not be on your list is carp. We have a long history in the community sense of a wish to control carp. We have a successful community-based program in Wangaratta. We have quite a successful commercial-based company in the north-east — Charlie Carp. But we recognise that the control of carp could have significant advantages to Australia and obviously to Victoria. It would require a similar dialogue with the community to actually understand all the issues and the impact and the potential as well. It is probably one of those species that does need a lot of community dialogue around, of which I think CMAs are well placed to actually do.

Mr YOUNG — Referring to fishermen — fishing is just another form of hunting; it just uses a different tool, so it is very relevant to this inquiry. I am glad someone is talking about it; that is good. In regard to your conversation earlier about a pilot program for the use of deer carcasses, you mentioned that there would be an inherent difference between animals taken on private property and those that are retrieved from public land. You alluded to the fact that that is because of the physical restraints on getting them out. Is there any other reasons or is it simply that? Hypothetically if there is a deer that you cannot get out, it is lost anyway, but if one is shot on public land, it is easily accessible. Is there any other reason why that could not be included in the program?

Mr McCARTHY — Around — and Lachlan mentioned this — Wodonga, the public land domain there could actually be part of that process, and probably would be very appropriate given that it would be inappropriate to leave carcasses lying through the Albury-Wodonga parkland where a lot of people recreate. Obviously in a lot more remote national parks, wilderness et cetera it is very problematic. There is a very distinct difference between deer and, let us say, bush kangaroo, in terms of they do occur in mobs and you

can probably get volume in certain public land domains. So that is probably the basic difference, but I have not really analysed that process chain in national parks to actually work out if it is possible or not.

Mr CAMPBELL — I guess the private land is an easy get. I think that is legislatively, and it would be an easy way to test what we think is achievable.

Mr McCARTHY — And a pilot would avoid PrimeSafe concerns, which would be probably a good thing to start with, because we are just interested in: is there a processing chain that would work? Therefore other people can resolve if it should actually enter into — —

Mr YOUNG — And if it is not going to work, there is no point bringing PrimeSafe and those issues in — fair enough. Was it the Upper Murray Landcare group that put out the information pack on deer?

Mr McCARTHY — Yes.

Mr YOUNG — Out of those forums you were talking about, some of the major concerns were about illegal hunting and poaching. Just a question — you may not know the answer to this — but was there included in that pack information on the GMA's attitude towards illegal hunting and poaching as far as the respect campaign that they are running and the hotline for dobbing in illegal hunters?

Mr CAMPBELL — Look, I am not aware, I am sorry about that. I am not totally sure that it was included, but it is certainly something you have brought to my attention. I have not been made aware of it, so we will certainly pass that to the group up there. I guess just on the illegal shooting and poaching, it is a real issue in the community.

Mr YOUNG — Absolutely.

Mr CAMPBELL — I would say 50 per cent of the issues around deer are about the poor behaviour of a very small minority. It is clearly something that needs clearing up. I think the industry has a responsibility; the associations, ADA and SSAA. I think we all have a responsibility, because it will make other things hard if we do not clean it up. Some portions of the community are scared. I do not want to overemphasise that, but I think you need to be aware. It is absolutely an issue out there, and they would like us to raise it, I am sure.

Mr YOUNG — That is why I asked if that information is available, because GMA actually do quite a bit of work in that space, so it would be good to have that also getting out.

Mr CAMPBELL — We have a problem up here, I guess — our isolation. VicPol have to be two up pretty much, and a lot of the stations are 24-hours. These are remote sites. The community really would like some support, I think.

Mr RAMSAY — Thank you, Lachlan and Neil. I am just wondering, would you mind tabling that presentation to the committee — your overheads — which is a little bit different than your submission. Like Tim, I home in on the fact that there is already a fairly high level regional roundtable with significant stakeholders discussing exactly the issues that we are discussing, specifically in their case for deer, but which could be expanded out to invasive pests quite easily or perhaps those that are a priority. My question would be, firstly, would you be prepared to provide a further submission in relation to additional outcomes out of that roundtable, because you are having access to some key stakeholders in this particular region where there is a large amount of deer? It would be helpful to us if the work that you are doing already could be translated to us at a given point in time. You only meet twice a year — I understand that — but at least you are getting a lot of feedback from those key stakeholders that would be useful for us in the culmination of our report also down the track.

Mr McCARTHY — Yes.

Mr RAMSAY — You are saying 'yes'. That is good. Thank you.

Mr McCARTHY — Yes, we would be happy. Our next regional roundtable is in late November. Following that we will have a further update. I doubt if the update will be much different from what we have already disclosed and talked about at this stage.

Mr RAMSAY — Can I ask in that roundtable if you would be prepared to test the current Alpine National Park deer trial? Because there are already some learnings, as you suggest in your submission, in that which are not overly consistent with what we have been hearing through our inquiry. Perhaps it might be useful if you could test what is coming out of that trial as against your stakeholder group to see if there is some consistency in learnings.

Mr McCARTHY — Yes, we could ask Parks Victoria to present on that trial to the roundtable.

Mr RAMSAY — They are a stakeholder anyway, are they not?

Mr McCARTHY — Yes.

Mr RAMSAY — I mean, they are talking about:

Volunteer commitment to the project is very high —

which we understand —

Professional hunters are delivering high-level outcomes —

which is a little bit grey in the area that we have been working on.

Night operations appear most promising ...

We have heard a little bit about that. Then of course there is the deer movement in relation to the high plains. But testing that work, and I know it goes to 2018, against what outcomes you are learning from the roundtable I think would be useful to us.

The CHAIR — Can I just quickly ask one about the community perception and the reality in terms of the shooters that are not doing the right thing? We have not heard a lot from people giving examples of the terrible things that have happened. In terms of recommendations, if it is real and it is happening, you have got to have recommendations about all that, because if you open up more areas for shooting, you need more compliance and regulation and all of that. Or is it a view in people's minds, and that is more an awareness-raising thing? Have you got any ideas or suggestions on how we can deal with that? They are two different things.

Mr McCARTHY — We can reinforce how important the issue is. So at each of our forums we have had VicPol participate. At those forums the community do want to have a long conversation with VicPol about how it should be managed and how the community should respond. A good example is at Whitfield. We had longstanding members talk about the fact that in the middle of the night someone would shoot from the side of a road and they are there petrified, worrying if it is going to come through their house. VicPol would walk through and explain how to report it et cetera, and hence why the Rural Watch type-concept.

The CHAIR — But it is only a 000 number. It is not a special direct line to anybody.

Mr McCARTHY — No. But 000 is the correct number to call. So at each forum it is a big conversation about the behavioural elements, and therefore some of the ideas that are coming about the Rural Watch are: having the right signs on your property and being very clear if you are a land manager how you authorise someone to be on your property. There are legal forms that you can use, and we make sure at each forum people are very aware of those. But that will still leave a minority dilemma in the sense of that individual who might be doing something that is probably closer to being illegal out there, which is what the community are concerned about. You can narrow that, so VicPol being very proactive, but it is a big challenge. Most of these sites where the real problems are are very remote.

Then you couple that with the great programs that sporting shooters ADA have about hunter behaviour and getting them to be part of that model, and we would just commend that that should be promoted a lot more in the sense of getting the majority of people on board. The Game Management Authority supports that as well, so there is a range of things that we have that is lifting it, making people aware, but there will be circumstances. We know that, and I do not know if there is an exact solution to minimise that.

What was expressed at Whitfield was there were people who have lived in their community for a long time really concerned for their own personal safety, and these are people who are actually probably involved in managing the pest animals on their property using firearms et cetera and know how to behave in the right way. They are concerned, but yes, there is a plethora of things that the forums have come out with from the hunter behavioural-type stuff right through to the Rural Watch-type programs.

The main thing is actually the community landing on that suite of things because they have to be locally embedded. That is the Upper Murray Landcare model of actually saying if it is not at that level, and if the local policeman does not understand it, it will not work — as well as the local Parks Victoria ranger, et cetera.

Mr CAMPBELL — Just adding to that, Brian. Presently I think it is around \$130 to get a game licence. You can do it online. You do not even have to see them. If you want to go and shoot wild ducks, you have got to go and do a course. You have got to identify them. There is a whole process there. With the community, I think it is getting to a point where they are going to request that sort of thing. I think they would rather less red tape than more, but I think by getting a game management licence the responsibility and intent that you have to undertake with how you behave and — —

The CHAIR — More regulation is not always about red tape. Sometimes you can do things in an efficient way.

Mr CAMPBELL — Sure, sure. But it is getting to that point where the community expects more of those people who have the responsibility of shooting game and carrying a firearm and how they behave in the community. I just had a lady last week up the King Valley approach me saying she was scared witless. Her husband got bailed up on the boundary. He went to the Whitfield police station. She was left on her own, another car came up the driveway. She thought it was the same person and she did not know what to do. You know 000 is the way to go, but there are a lot of stories like that.

The CHAIR — If you are an hour away from the police — —

Mr CAMPBELL — You are. So I think there is a responsibility that if you are carrying a firearm, you undertake to behave in a certain way.

Mr RAMSAY — Can I just quickly ask about Rural Watch: is that program managed by anyone or is that merely an initiative by Victoria Police to say ring 000 if you have got an issue?

Mr McCARTHY — No. That is an initiative of the Upper Murray Landcare Group to actually encourage people, if they see something, to ring 000. So it is not a government-based program or a VicPol program, but a community group can actually create programs like that. It is just working together and encouraging people to have the right signs in place.

Mr CAMPBELL — It is based on Neighbourhood Watch.

Mr RAMSAY — Yes. I was going to say Crime Stoppers does the same thing and Neighbourhood Watch. So I am just wondering — but Neighbourhood Watch is backed by quite a formal structure, as is Crime Stoppers through Victoria Police. But Rural Watch I have not really heard of. It is really just peculiar to this neck of the woods, isn't it?

Mr McCARTHY — Yes, it is a very remote community approach.

Mr RAMSAY — Without a policeman.

Mr McCARTHY — Which might evolve into using Crime Stoppers.

Mr CAMPBELL — Without a 24-hour police station, because most of the issues happen between one and five in the morning. They know.

Mr RAMSAY — So it is more of an awareness.

Mr CAMPBELL — It is the community's response to an issue. I think given they are remote, they are quite innovative in how they go about trying to work through issues.

The CHAIR — Thanks very much. Thanks for coming in and clearing up some of those things. I am sure we will be in further contact.

Mr McCARTHY — Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.