

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land

Melbourne — 5 September 2016

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Mr Barry Howlett, executive officer, Australian Deer Association.

The CHAIR — Welcome to Mr Barry Howlett, executive officer of the Australian Deer Association. Just before you go into your presentation, I will just go through a few of the formalities, and that is to say that the evidence that you are giving today is being recorded, and a copy of the transcript will be provided to you just to check for accuracy prior to it being publicly made available. Also anything you say at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, the same does not occur once you are out of the hearing. Perhaps I will put it over to you. I think the secretariat might have explained if you could give us a short introductory presentation of about 10 minutes, and then we will have lots of questions that we would like to ask you. Thank you.

Mr HOWLETT — Thanks, Chair. I appreciate that our submission did not go in until this morning, so people probably have not had a chance to read it.

The CHAIR — Sorry, yes. It has been distributed to us, but we pretty well have not had a chance to read it.

Mr HOWLETT — So the Australian Deer Association is a membership-based deer hunting and conservation organisation. We were founded in Melbourne back in 1969, and we have active branches in every state and territory of Australia. As the name would suggest, we have a very specific focus, which is centred on deer. It comes from the background of a real conservation ethic. We have sort of been talking about conservation since long before it was fashionable to do so. The first two aims of our association are quite telling as to what we stand for, which is the improvement of the status of deer in Australia, and the promotion and research into the habits of deer and scientific study of deer in Australia and their relationship with the Australian environment. So even though our organisation is predominantly made up of deer hunters, our objects are more focused around the deer than they are around the hunting.

We are unapologetic about advocating for wild deer and deer hunting to continue as a sustainable use of the Australian environment, but we are cognisant of the fact that our practical positions cannot be based on ideology; rather they must be informed by evidence and data. In dealing with issues before us, we also always try to start with facts and data. Conservation wildlife management initiatives should aim to address actual rather than perceived problems and to reduce impacts rather than simply focusing on the number of animals removed. ADA is currently involved in two trial programs on the Bogong High Plains and Wilsons Promontory, and three full-blown — —

The CHAIR — Sorry, we do not have a copy of your submission. They must have come in a bit later. So just before I said that we did have it, but it was a different one. So sorry, we are waiting for that to come. It will just be a minute or so, but please continue.

Mr HOWLETT — We are currently involved in two trial programs on the Bogong High Plains and Wilsons Promontory and three full-blown control programs, which are in the Dandenongs, Mitchell River National Park and the lakes coastal park. They are all under the direction of Parks Victoria. In addition we have been involved for the past decade in deer monitoring programs at Suggan Buggan in the far east of the state and Mount Buffalo and conservation projects such as the revegetation of the Clydebank Morass State Game Reserve and the erection of deer exclusion fencing below Lake Mountain.

We are also involved in a number of deer control programs on private land in conjunction with Trust for Nature, Landcare groups, catchment management authorities and individual private landowners. Wild deer populations and distribution in Victoria have increased markedly since the late 1990s. There is a need now, more than ever, for well-considered strategic management. There is no evidence to support the contention that recreational hunting has no effect on wild deer populations. It has been suggested that recreational hunters killed in the order of 70 000 wild deer in Victoria last year, predominantly on public land, and there are local areas where this has undeniably put downward pressure on deer numbers. So even though deer numbers may be increasing, that does not mean that taking deer out is not having an impact on that.

An Australian review, recently published by the Mammal Society, contemplates the question: can recreational hunting contribute to pest mammal control on public land in Australia? It arrives at a very interesting conclusion: reliable information derived from scientific investigation of real-world situations is

urgently needed to support the establishment of rational, agreed and achievable management objectives. Until such information becomes available debate over the roles of recreational hunting as a means of pest management on public lands will continue to be dominated by untested hypotheses, selective half-truths and logical fallacies. ADA supports and concurs with this conclusion.

Effective management is not constrained by the legal status of deer. Wild deer in Victoria are managed as game species under the auspices of the Wildlife (Game) Regulations. On public land where deer hunting is permitted, wild deer, other than hog deer, can be hunted up to 365 days a year with no bag limit. A number of groups advocate for wild deer to be classified as pests instead of game animals. The typical rationale for this is that wild deer are somehow afforded protection from control by virtue of game status. Wild deer — again, other than hog deer, which are quite low in numbers and are a very discrete population — are unprotected on private land in Victoria under a Governor in Council order. With the exception of some necessary animal welfare constraints this order enables private landowners and managers to control wild deer populations on their property as they see fit. Public land managers also have mechanisms to allow them to control while deer outside of the game regulations.

Prohibitions on spotlighting on public land are maintained in the interests of public safety and would not conceivably be removed if deer were to be reclassified. Whilst a number of groups have an ideologically-based preference for wild deer to be reclassified as a pest animal, there is no evidence from other jurisdictions to suggest that doing so would aid in management efforts. Pest declarations in South Australia and Queensland have apparently had no impact on the rate of increase of deer populations. Nearly a decade after the removal of game status for wild deer in Queensland the populations of the four well-established wild deer species in that state are all significantly higher than when they were afforded game status. That is not to say that affording deer game status has any particular impact on their numbers either. A shift to pest status would disenfranchise Victoria's hunting community and undermine the game licensing system and the successful Respect campaign that has been developed in partnership with government agencies, recreational hunting organisations and industry.

Last week I had the pleasure of presenting a paper to the Conservation through Sustainable Use of Wildlife Conference up in Brisbane. There was a paper presented there that outlined the difficulties in collecting valuable data on hunter effort and success in all of the Australian jurisdictions where deer are not afforded game status. In preparing the paper the authors conducted surveys of government departments engaged in deer and hunter management across Australia. The paper's co-author Ellen Freeman from Central Queensland University stated:

The survey results, with the exception of the Northern Territory, showed that wild deer are presenting increasing management issues and there is considerable scope for government departments to have greater engagement with recreational hunters.

Game hunting in Victoria has a unique egalitarian culture. Hunters from across Australia and from across the world regularly travel to Victoria to enjoy the public land access to sambar deer, which are a highly prized game animal. Game licensing in Victoria is affordable, and it enables equitable access to participants like few other places on earth.

Animal welfare is an important consideration for hunters. Licensed game hunters are aware of, and bound by, the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals in Hunting and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. The *Victorian Hunting Guide*, which is issued to all licensed hunters, clearly outlines hunters' obligations. Further to legal obligations, hunters take pride in effecting a swift and humane death for their quarry with a one-shot kill being the desired conclusion of a hunt. Game hunters regularly practise their marksmanship and have a deep understanding of their quarry's anatomy and the best shot placement to effect a humane death.

Recreational hunting in Victoria has an exceptional safety record. In 2010 the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine conducted a review of external cause sporting-related fatalities listed on the National Coronial Information System database for the decade between 2000 and 2010. Hunting featured in less

than 0.85 per cent of incidents, and land users other than hunters did not feature in any of the hunting-related incidents.

ADA's involvement in deer control programs with Parks Victoria has grown more or less organically. The programs involve a considerable amount of administration from ADA, and in recognition of this fact the Victorian government recently delivered us a grant of \$75 000 per annum to cover some of these expenses. The programs also cost Parks Victoria's budget to the tune of some hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.

This inquiry has given us pause to step back and consider the programs more objectively. Our conclusion is that these types of programs should be the exception and that opening up areas to recreational hunting, where there is no good reason not to do so, should be the rule. We believe that all control programs, whether they are using volunteers or paid shooters, should be underpinned by solid data to quantify the problem, a clear understanding of what needs to be achieved, appropriate resourcing to ensure that targets can be met and continuous monitoring and review to ensure that programs are meeting expectations. In almost all instances this should include monitoring of vegetation, monitoring of deer abundance and, in the case of programs utilising volunteers, monitoring of volunteer sentiment.

A checklist before commencing a program might be: is the problem clearly quantified? Is there a clear understanding of what is required to address the problem? Is treatment possible or feasible through simply opening the area in question to recreational hunting? Is there robust monitoring of all species of wildlife involved in the undesired impact? Is there robust monitoring of the environmental asset which is being impacted? Is there adequate resourcing to achieve the desired outcomes? Is there monitoring of volunteer and community sentiment?

Of the five programs that we are involved in with Parks Victoria, the three full-blown control programs broadly fit these criteria. The two trial programs, the ones on Wilsons Promontory and the Bogong High Plains, in our opinion do not. There are a number of the impediments to the effective management of wild deer in Victoria by recreational hunting, whether through these tightly managed programs or otherwise. Key amongst these is the exclusion from vast tracks of public land without a good reason. An example of this is the Snowy River National Park, which has low visitation and deer in abundant numbers. There are numerous others.

Sound moderators are widely used internationally by hunters but are not available to recreational hunters in Victoria. Moderators reduce the noise emitted from rifles — they do not remove the noise entirely — minimising the disturbance of wildlife and the ability of alert wildlife to assess the location of a shooter, consequently increasing the possibility of hunters having the opportunity to take either a follow-up shot or take multiple animals. Moderators also reduce what we call felt recoil, leading to more accurate shot placement and faster recovery between shots. They also reduce the likelihood of hearing loss for hunters.

Another significant limitation to effective deer management programs is the relative lack of research into the habits, population dynamics, movement and distribution of wild deer in the Victorian context. It is not feasible to properly and proactively manage deer without a clear, well-resourced strategy supported by sound and relevant research.

There are a number of regulatory constraints limiting the ability to sustainably use the carcasses of deer and other wildlife killed during control programs. Some of these programs are involved in numbers, as you might have heard, of up to 30 a year on private property. It is too much for a single hunter to just take home and process in their shed. The inability of hunters and land managers to have carcasses processed on commercial meat handling premises, either for human or animal consumption, can result in an unwillingness of volunteer hunters to be involved in 'shoot to waste' operations, as it is often repugnant to their personal values and ethics. In jurisdictions such as New Zealand, the United States of America and the United Kingdom game hunters are afforded the option of having their kill processed on commercial premises.

Our organisation is committed to working with government and other stakeholders on deer management issues in Victoria using a sound, pragmatic, evidence-based approach. Thank you for the opportunity to present. I welcome any questions.

The CHAIR — Thank you. That was good. There seems to be in some of the submissions and some of the information we are getting a concern about recreational hunters being part of an invasive animal control program, because people would just be going off any old where and doing whatever, but from what you are saying it seems to be that you see it as part of an overall strategy. It is not the recreational hunter just going into a park and doing things. Is it part of a managed program? The other issue, of course, is concern about antisocial behaviour. How do you see that all fitting in with an organised program to try to reduce, in this case, deer?

Mr HOWLETT — In general, recreational hunting, we believe, has a role to play. If you look at an area like the Bogongs, the issues there are with male deer wallowing in alpine bogs. It is a pretty low visitor use area. If you were to go and tell a heap of deer hunters that there is a problem on the Bogong High Plains with male deer, I think they would be attracted to go up there and hunt those deer. Yes, generally recreational hunting is untargeted. That is the nature of it. We get out in the field and we shoot deer because we enjoy hunting. That is the general motivation. But that is not to say that allowing access in areas — and I have got to be careful because we have not got any really good data to underpin this. What we are typically seeing is that deer are emerging as an invasive animal in areas where we are excluded from recreational hunting. There is a correlation there.

Mr YOUNG — Thanks, Barry, for that. What are the main reasons that we are excluded from those areas?

Mr HOWLETT — Some of them are historical. It goes back to — a long history story — the Land Conservation Council in the early 80s when they declared a lot of the new national parks back then. Deer hunting was included when there was a historic use of the area for deer hunting. So a lot of these parks — the Snowy is a great example; it had very few deer in it in 1983 when it was declared a national park, and very quickly after it was declared a national park the sambar moved in. So that was the rationale in the early 80s, and it does not stack up in the mid-2010s.

Mr YOUNG — If we have got areas like that that are national parks that are exactly the same in their make-up as other state forests and places where we can shoot, what are the restrictions in allowing us in there?

Mr HOWLETT — The National Parks Act, I believe, so these regulatory restrictions, but there is, as far as we are concerned, no practical or logical reason to exclude hunters. There are parks where there is, and I think the programs in the Dandenongs are a really good example of parks that you would probably never open to recreational hunting. It is just too high visitor, very urban, too tightly controlled, and programs are really appropriate there.

Mr YOUNG — So in those large areas where there is low visitation are there any safety concerns?

Mr HOWLETT — A hundred years of public land hunting sort of tells us no.

Mr YOUNG — I spoke earlier with the GMA about some work that was being done in the states regarding white-tail and health of the herd, and they have done a lot of work on studying the impacts of hunters on the herd and ways that we can change our habits to improve the health of those herds. So as a result, the mindset of hunters has greatly developed into a conservational tool. Are there ways — and I am sure you are aware of that kind of work over there — in which we can apply that here to curb hunter attitudes, because it has been raised as an issue that we are not effective in pest control because we only target males. Can we apply that same sort of stuff here to change our attitudes?

Mr HOWLETT — Yes, I think we can. I think it is a mix of education and of doing what they do in the states, which is targeting hunters to the areas where there is a problem. Certainly in New Zealand that is

a big factor. If you go to a Department of Conservation office in New Zealand and say, 'G'day mate, I'm here to go deer hunting', they will get a map out and show you where deer are abundant; they will direct you to where you want to go. We have got no such mechanism in Victoria.

Mr YOUNG — And also you mentioned commercial use. Do you think that would be a contributing factor in ensuring the hunters take more does and do not just let them walk by waiting for a good buck?

Mr HOWLETT — I believe it would be. I think a lot of people abhor wastage, hunters particularly, but most of the society. If we get interviewed in the media about deer hunting, from a curiosity value the first or second question we get asked is, 'What do you with the meat?'. I really do not want to answer. 'Well, we bury it in a pit'. If there were programs that allowed us to use that meat or, like they do in the United States, run hunt for the homeless programs where you can take that into a butcher and pay them \$4 a kilogram and have some people who need it use it, it would be far more palatable to hunters to take more female deer.

Mr RAMSAY — Thank you, Barry. I just have a couple of quick questions. I note your recommendations, and part of them is to give the Game Management Authority more jobs to do. We have heard evidence this morning that they either do not have the resources or the financial capacity to do much more than what they are already doing so if you were making recommendations in relation to them doing more work, that should also be followed with more resources and more money.

I also note DELWP has indicated that they do not have a policy at this stage in relation to control and management of deer in Victoria, so they are starting a long way from the eight ball in relation to developing policy and discussions with stakeholders in relation to how they might deal with this problem, which seems to be an emerging problem. The Invasive Species Council have indicated that they believe there should be a mix of a whole range of tools to deal with deer particularly, and that includes professional shooters as well as recreational, as well as baiting and other programs. I would just like to hear your opinion on that.

The second part of the question is: I am trying to do some rough maths. I thought there were about a million deer frolicking around the hills, but I am not sure whether it is in this state or in the country. Perhaps you can tell me that: how many deer are running around the place? The notes tell me that we should knock over about 58 000 per year and the graph tells me that for threshold to halt, maximum population growth is about 40 per cent. So if you take 40 per cent of 1 million, that is about 400 000 that need to be knocked over per year just to not increase population and we are only knocking over 58 000 in Victoria, so there seems to be a disparity, a large gap in how we actually control population growth in deer, whether it is in Victoria or Australia. I would like a response to that.

Also in relation to funding, are you paid — that is, your organisation — by the government or government departments to help manage and control invasive species? If you are, how much? What other stakeholder groups are being paid to do similar work, and would that funding be impacted by the expansion of recreational hunters in the future?

Mr HOWLETT — A few questions there. The mix of tools to manage deer: certainly what we need is a really good strategy to underpin it and then use a range of tools which includes hunters. Baiting I do not believe is feasible. I am happy to be corrected. There is no poison registered for use on deer in Victoria, and it is pretty difficult to imagine a poison or a biological control that is humane, that is species specific and that is readily distributable. I do not know if the Invasive Species Council pointed a particular poison out that they wanted to use, but it seems a long way off to me.

The other one was paid shooters. Yes, certainly. It goes to economics I suppose for the government — that is, how much money do you want to spend? I was talking to a bloke who wrote a paper in New Zealand on the economics of wild deer management from helicopters there. He quoted figures of about \$1200 an hour for a Robinson helicopter. That is running with two very skilled shooters, and the Kiwis are really good. Like, they use helicopters for everything, a lot of experience shooting from them, and in some areas they

were taking less than five deer an hour at \$1200 an hour. In some areas they were doing better, but these are red deer. So a herd animal, open country; it is not really comparable to sambar in the Alps.

You do a back of envelope calculation on the Victorian take, and you have got \$20 million to replace what recreational hunting is doing now. As you said, that is not in any way keeping track with the increase in deer numbers. I think someone from DELWP spoke earlier about the generalised invasion curve and how you need to be really realistic about where you are at and what you can do, and that that focus should be on protecting high-value environmental assets, and being practical and being reasonable. It is great to have this notion that yes, government should do this. And we hear that a lot: government should just manage deer out of existence. Do you want to shut down the Victorian health system to fund it? You have to be practical about these things.

With regards to our funding, we have a grant of \$75 000 a year over four years to help with the administration of these deer management programs, which is based on all the permits, all the rostering, all the work we have to do to run them. If the government accepted our recommendation of just opening areas up to recreational hunting, then there would be no need for us to ask for that money.

Mr RAMSAY — Thanks, Barry. Now how many deer roughly do we have in Victoria so I can get my numbers right? Has there been any work done to quantify it?

Mr HOWLETT — There is no — —

Ms WARD — How long is a piece of string?

Mr HOWLETT — Yes.

Mr RAMSAY — I was told it was around a million. Is that wrong, right or indifferent?

Mr HOWLETT — I would not argue with it, but I have seen no data to support it. Every indication is what you are saying is correct. We are looking a take of 50 000 deer. If you were looking at taking 40% of the population on the modelling we see, that still effects slight increase in population over five years, and that is assuming that it has been taken across all age and sex classes — so a completely indiscriminate take. It is well in the high hundreds of thousands based on those figures, but I am really wary of talking about things when we have not got any data or evidence to underpin it. But if someone said a million, I am not going to argue with them.

Ms WARD — I spoke earlier to Andrew Cox from the Invasive Species Council around the leaving behind of carcasses, and you have mentioned having to bury them and how they may attract wild dogs and increase the population. How big a problem do you think it is to leave carcasses around, whether it is in areas near where hunters can get access to, or whether it is in more mountainous or difficult terrain where you have got, for example, helicopter shooters?

Mr HOWLETT — The Arthur Rylah Institute did a study on this two or three years ago, Dr Dave Forsyth, who has since moved on, he is up in New South Wales now. He left sambar deer carcasses in areas known to be frequented by wild dogs and set up camera traps and went back at regular intervals, checked the information from the camera traps and measured the reduction in biomass of the deer based on dog predation, and he found that, while dogs visited most of the carcasses, they ate very little of them. He referred to some studies from a century ago. It basically comes down to wild dog behaviour. Wild dogs are hunters, they are not carrion eaters. Yes, they will go to a carcass, they will have a nibble on a bit of fresh meat, but anyone who has been out on sheep farms in wild dog country will tell you that wild dogs like to kill. They like to hunt and they like to kill. It is one of these logical fallacies that deer in bush equals wild dog, but the evidence does not support that contention.

Ms WARD — We have had some farmers, for example, who have talked about carcasses being near their boundaries and that that draws in wild dogs and that it affects their livestock. Have you been able to see evidence of that?

Mr HOWLETT — I have not seen evidence of that. Like I said, wild dogs will visit a carcass, so no doubt if they have got carcasses on their boundaries they may well see wild dogs at the carcass. It may well be their livestock that is attracting the wild dogs as well.

Ms WARD — I also just quickly wanted to go over the economic benefits of increased hunting and being able to access deer on Crown land. Can you expand on that? We mentioned that earlier this morning with the Game Management Authority. Have you got any research or any data on the economic benefits of this?

Mr HOWLETT — The best research is the one the Victorian government did, which was released in 2014, which estimated the economic importance of hunting in 2013, or whenever it was. It showed a net benefit of all hunting to the state of about \$439 million a year. I cannot remember the exact figure for deer, but I remember that deer hunting was the largest single element of that. Certainly what we found really interesting about that was that 60 per cent of the hunters resided in metropolitan areas, but 60 per cent of the expenditure was in regional areas, so local government areas like Mansfield had very high expenditure — you know, in the order of \$10 million.

Mr YOUNG — Just on that, I could be wrong, but I think that was only game hunting.

Mr HOWLETT — Yes, that was only game hunting.

Mr YOUNG — It did not actually include pest hunting in that study.

Mr HOWLETT — And if you look at Mansfield, you would assume that 99 per cent of that spend was deer hunters. If you went out and looked at Donald, you would assume that most of that was duck hunters.

Ms WARD — And within that report, was there any discussion of jobs created?

Mr HOWLETT — There was, but I cannot recall the figures. I do not want to quote figures that I do not recall exactly.

Ms WARD — No, that is okay. Thank you.

Mr TILLEY — Just a couple of quick ones. Thanks, Barry, for giving us your time today and certainly for a contribution that I think is pretty pragmatic; it is pretty good. That brings me to your conclusion. No doubt you have had an opportunity to read some of the submissions. We talk with organisations like the ADA, we are about to hear from the SSAA, and certainly with other interested parties. Because you are a shooter or participant and you talk about conservation, there is this massive argument that it is all a ruse, it is just a guise. Are you able to impart to us some of your experiences? When we talk about legitimate, licensed, regulated hunting and shooting pursuits, why does the other side of the debate immediately jump to the old default position that it is all just a ruse?

Mr HOWLETT — I am not in their minds. I suppose there is a natural scepticism of using conservation to justify what we do, which we do not do. We say that recreational hunting is a legitimate use of Crown or government land in Victoria; it is a legitimate activity full stop. Most hunters are people who like being out in nature. We would be shooting targets if that was not the case. A deer hunt for me typically results in no deer, but even the ones that did would result in 8 hours of effort in the field and one shot being fired, and then several hours after that in bringing the carcass home, preparing it, making sausages and doing whatever else I do. There could be 40 hours involved in the whole experience that takes one shot. An awful lot of that is based around a conservation ethic, which is not so much aimed at being a greenie, but just because we enjoy wild places; we like to be out in the natural environment. It just comes naturally to us. People are welcome to be sceptical about that.

Clydebank is a great example. That is a state game reserve. It was purchased by probably the Bolte government as a duck swamp. It is basically degraded former farmland, fairly saline, really low-lying. It sat there for 50 years or so as degraded former farmland with a bit of water in it. We recognised that it is really good habitat for hog deer, which are quite scarce, and public land opportunities for hog deer are

quite rare. So we have spent the last 11 winters completely revegetating that reserve, planting out trees — our members, our money — not because we want to tell a feelgood conservation story. If you wanted to tell a feelgood conservation story you would show up and plant trees once. We did it because habitat is a really important thing to us, and what we have found is this huge improvement in biodiversity. The water has improved because of the trees around it. The wildlife has improved. There are kangaroos, there are birds, there are insects. Deer is a small part of the whole experience for us. I do not know if it answers it or not, Bill.

Mr TILLEY — No, no, that is good. With that, are there some partnerships? When you talk about conservation, are there some partnerships that are formed to prove the fact that there are some significant and some real conservation outcomes?

Mr HOWLETT — We certainly partnered in those programs with people like land managers, people like Parks Victoria and Greening Australia. Another example is this conference we went to last week, which was the Conservation through Sustainable Use of Wildlife Conference. What was really interesting about that was it was three days of various symposia and ecologists and biologists and environmentalists from all over the world, and none of them for a second doubted the sincerity or the credentials of hunters in a conservation aspect; it was just taken for granted that that is a part of hunting.

Mr TILLEY — So with better partnerships, better education and the legitimate hunting and shooting pursuits of Victorians, international visitors and interstate visitors, could we potentially grow the Victorian economy?

Mr HOWLETT — Yes, certainly. I think that research estimating the economic impact really shows that, and it is very under-tapped. If you look at hog deer, Victoria is the only place in the world where there is a viable huntable population of hog deer. There are international tourists coming onto probably two private properties that specialise in that at the moment. But if we could encourage landowners to see the value in conserving a bit of their agricultural enterprise for deer, there is serious money to be made. With sambar deer, again Victoria and New Zealand are the only two places in the world you can go and hunt sambar.

Mr TILLEY — Whilst we are on New Zealand, I have a final question. You mentioned earlier moderators. Is it like for like with firearms in New Zealand? You named the model; anything suitable for hunting deer. You can acquire that same firearm for the same purpose in New Zealand and yet you cannot do it in Australia.

Mr HOWLETT — Yes, a recreational hunter can walk into a gun shop in New Zealand buy a Tikka T3 .270 and say, 'Hey, can you put a moderator on that and I'll have one off the shelf' and get it.

Mr TILLEY — Is that something to do with the federal legislation when it changed back in — —

Mr YOUNG — Ninety-six.

Mr TILLEY — Yes, that will do.

Mr HOWLETT — I do not believe there is any restriction on recreational hunters having moderators in the national firearms agreement. It seems to be the application of that agreement in states and it goes to this whole aversion, I call it hysteria, but it is close to private firearm ownership — that it must be tightly controlled. I honestly do not see a logical reason for excluding us from having moderators.

Mr RICHARDSON — Thanks, Barry, for coming in today. To start extrapolating on Bill's well-made points about the perceptions of conservation, and I note the economics of that, I think a mainstream and more generalised population does not have any appreciation of the urgency of the deer population impacts on the wildlife. Those numbers that have been taken out by deer hunters, if that were to be expanded, what investigations are there on recreational hunting? I take your point about New Zealand's approach with the helicopters and that the economics do not seem to stack up at all. Can you please just extrapolate on Bill's point? What work has been done with the government and the departments to try to better educate people

about that approach and how urgent it is to try to manage the emerging sambar deer population around Victoria?

Mr HOWLETT — Very, very little. We publish a magazine called *Australian Deer*, which goes out on newsstands and goes to all of our members every two months. We run a regular column. Every two months there is a column on conservation in that and there are two pages on game management to educate hunters. We have been speaking about those issues in that magazine for, I think, 20 years. Twenty years ago we had an article published in Victoria saying, ‘Shoot more hinds — take more female deer’. But as far as a coordinated, integrated approach, there really is nothing.

Mr RICHARDSON — Do you see this inquiry as maybe the vehicle for that? There is the economic but also the meat production as well, which I think is an untapped potential economic benefit for the state. What are some of the strategies that the deer association, your organisation, thinks should be implemented to try to get to those outcomes?

Mr HOWLETT — Certainly education is a part of it. I spoke earlier in response to I think it was Daniel’s question about targeting the recreational efforts more keenly, and allowing that carcass utilisation is a piece of that. It could be places like the Wonnagatta Station that are locked up during winter. Hunters backpack in, they go in there looking for a trophy. It is really logical that when they have walked in for a day, they are not going to shoot a meat animal and remove it. I am thinking pie-in-the-sky stuff but perhaps facilitating a Parks Victoria collection service for carcasses to get them out of the park. Hunters are seeing multiple female deer in there, and they would be inclined to take them if they could use them. We need to be a bit more innovative and think outside the box.

The CHAIR — Just one quick final question about paid shooters, do you see a space for both the recreational shooter and those who are paid to get rid of deer? It just seems that they are everywhere. Is it possible to have both working — I do not know whether together or in different areas?

Mr HOWLETT — I think there needs to be. Recreational shooters cannot do everything. If you look at these control programs that we are involved in, which more or less replicate what paid shooters will be doing, it is less than 1 per cent of the hunters in the state who are involved.

The CHAIR — Are they in the same areas or different areas?

Mr HOWLETT — The Bogong trial, I believe, has got paid and recreational, but often they are in different areas and there is stuff that paid shooters can do that we cannot. They have sound moderators, semiautomatic firearms, in some instances, and a lot of investment. We have started using thermal imaging gear on some of these programs and it is \$4000 for a monocular and then \$4000 for a scope. So your paid shooters are geared up with some really, really good equipment. Again it comes down to targeting them really well, because the state has a finite amount of money that it is ever going to spend on these things.

The CHAIR — Thank you for coming in. We may have other questions and, if you do not mind, we will write to you about them, and if you could answer them that would be really good.

Mr HOWLETT — Certainly. Happy to.

The CHAIR — Thanks very much for your time today.

Witness withdrew.