

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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Witnesses

Mr Cameron Skedd, president, and

Mr Kevin Grise, secretary, Vertebrate Pest Managers Association.

The CHAIR — Welcome to this first public hearing of the inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land, and thank you to Mr Grise and Mr Skedd for coming in today.

Mr SKEDD — My name is Cameron Skedd. I am the president of the Vertebrate Pest Managers Association of Australia. I have been asked to come in and present some information. Thanks for the opportunity as well, and I have got Kevin Grise here, who is the secretary for my association. What we are representing about — —

The CHAIR — Sorry, just before we start, we have a bit of a formality to go through. The evidence that you are giving today is being recorded and the transcript will be sent to you for you to have a look at and check for accuracy before it is made publicly available. Also anything that you say within this public hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege, but of course once the hearing is over the parliamentary privilege no longer applies. I think the secretariat has spoken to you about presenting, say, for 10 minutes to us and then allowing plenty of time for committee members to ask questions. So thank you again for coming, and I will pass it over to you, Mr Skedd.

Mr SKEDD — Thanks, Bronwyn. So I am the president of an association of about 60 member companies who are all professional pest managers working for government departments and private enterprise. We do works covering many animals, invasive species and native animals as well as the introduced species. So we do fox baiting, trapping, shooting, den destruction, rabbit baiting, shooting, biocontrols — we introduce calicivirus as one of the biocontrols — and warren and harbourage removal. We do wild dog and feral pig trapping, baiting and shooting, feral goat trapping and shooting, and ground and aerial platform culling, and we work with vets quite often darting to implant hormone pregnancy control on kangaroos and wallabies.

The Sporting Shooters and ADA associations — they are made up of people from the general public who may be plumbers, concreters, accountants or builders et cetera who have an interest in recreational shooting. Our members only work in professional pest management companies. So I own Acacia Pest Control. There are others called Eco Agri, Weed and Wildlife Control, Gotcha Pest Control, Vermin Solutions, Wildlife Unlimited and many more companies in my association.

Our members collaborate together, refer work opportunities to other members and band together as teams on larger projects. They spend their days conducting professional vermin and pest control services. A few facets of their days are probably water surveys, multiple site visits to work out what is going on in a geographical area, establishing feeding patterns in their target animals — that could be for baiting programs and/or shooting programs, or trapping as well — engaging in training procedure writing for their staff and carrying out early-morning, after-hours and through-the-night works, because this is what they do; it is a full-time job. There is also filling out of red tape for the government department permit applications and licence renewals et cetera.

So the various works are for council, the military, urban and peri-urban and private land holdings, state national parks, water catchment lands, beach reserves managed by Parks Victoria and coast committees, local council-managed parks and reserves and airports. We also work in public and private golf courses, federal government, federal airports and military bases. Those are the basics of what we do.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Looking at your submission, which is dated Wednesday, 31 August, what you say is that recreational hunting could form part of an integrated deer and other feral invasive animal control program. Is that what is occurring at the moment in terms of the trials that are underway through the Sporting Shooters Association? Is that what is happening now?

Mr SKEDD — No, Sporting Shooters are really only shooting. There is nothing integration with, say, trapping or integration with harbour removal, which we would use for a different species. There is no baiting of deer allowed in Australia, unlike New Zealand, where there are baiting programs for New Zealand. So that would be the integrated pest management program, but we would use different methods of control. Shooting is just one method of control.

The CHAIR — And in terms of members of your organisation — obviously this is their living, to get rid of invasive animals — how would you see that into the future? We have had these trials with the recreational shooters. How would you see going forward a program where you have got those that are paid and that do not just shooting but other pest control arrangements with the recreational shooters? Just for our purposes, as a committee that is to give recommendations to government, how would you see that into the future working in a way that would be, one, effective and, two, ensuring that people who are already doing this for work are not losing their jobs?

Mr SKEDD — Well, that is right. This is what we are concerned about at the moment. Several of my members have had contracts pulled out from under their noses. Sherwood forest and Yellingbo are two of them. Unfortunately that work was given to the Sporting Shooters. So they have lost their income straight away from those two contracts. It is a lot of money for a small operator. Then we find out that the Sporting Shooters did not do it for free; there were some donations given. There has been an announcement that the ADA are receiving \$5.3 million from the Victorian government as a donation for safety to the ADA. We are concerned that the government and Parks Victoria, which have been giving us a lot of work over the years, are not giving us the work anymore, but the money is being diverted to the Sporting Shooters and the ADA.

The CHAIR — Okay, but how would you see into the future of working in such a way that would be — it sounds like there are plenty of pests that need to be gotten rid of. How do you think it could work for both organisations?

Mr SKEDD — We would like to work with them, the Sporting Shooters and the ADA. Having them directed by the professionals, or the government departments, advised by the professionals, who are doing this work, they can help us maybe clean up areas. We as professionals know that we can get a lot of the animal numbers reduced with the tools of the trade that we have. In shooting deer at the moment there is no baiting or trapping allowed under government legislation, so shooting is the only option for deer control.

Our members have access to what is known as category D firearms. Category D — a lot of people recognise them as a military-type firearm. They have large magazine capacities. For sambar deer, the minimum calibre of .308 is a legal requirement. You must use a .308 and 150-odd gram projectile for animal welfare considerations. These rifles — the category D rifles — have 20 rounds in their magazine, and they are a semiautomatic, so every time you pull the trigger the rifle will discharge a round. The basic comparison would be to something like a bolt-action rifle, which is much slower in its ability to fire per minute.

Our members, with the category D firearms, have been able to control 20 or 30 sambar deer in about a minute flat as they are running across an open reserve or when they are turning up now on the water catchment lands, which are open lands — dry dams and things like that. They are physically able to control a larger number of animals within a much smaller time frame with just a one or two-man team. I have had numbers quoted of around \$50 per deer for some of our members working on farmland in Victoria controlling sambar deer. It can be a very efficient method of control cost-wise. I have members in Tasmania who do a lot of this. They free-feed, so they train the deer to come to feed stations. They can control during the night 50 animals a day, 200 days a year, and that is with one person. The time efficiencies — the man-hours efficiencies — for professionals and the tools that we have at our disposal, that are given to us, are very significant.

Victoria Police are the ones who issue the firearms licences in Victoria. Sporting Shooters basically do not get access to those same firearms; only a professional does. There are other things like controlling animals in populous places around urban and peri-urban situations close to houses, where you generally cannot discharge a firearm. We have access to populous place permits. Because of the licence category we are working under with Victoria Police that issue the shooters licence, we can actually do that work. So there are a lot of deer turning up in the peri-urban and urban areas now, where we in fact apply for and get populous place permits.

Mr YOUNG — Thanks for your presentation and submission. Are you able to tell us what ratio or percentage of your work is done for government contracts versus the private sector?

Mr SKEDD — I am not privy to that from my members generally, but I would say it would be 60:40, so 60 government, 40, at a guess. That would vary through all my members and the contracts and the works that they are doing on the ground for various employers. There are a couple of our members who basically only work for the military on their military sites.

Mr YOUNG — Do you have any data on numbers for how many deer are controlled? Most of the talk we have been talking about is deer.

Mr SKEDD — I have a handout from last year. Can I submit some information? This came down just yesterday from a member in Tasmania. Just keep in mind, in Tasmania you are allowed to shoot possums under the state's permit.

The CHAIR — Just for the transcript, because it is only audio, would you mind just explaining the table that you have provided to us.

Mr SKEDD — Yes. He kept records. He was working for a commercial enterprise.

Ms WARD — Sorry, who is he?

Mr SKEDD — He is a member of mine from Tasmania.

Ms WARD — So this is from an unnamed member from Tasmania of your group?

Mr SKEDD — Yes. He has actually provided this information in a Tasmanian committee inquiry recently, so this is an excerpt from the information that he has given to the state government in Tasmania. So what this does is this gives you an idea of the amount of animals that can be controlled by a professional at a given time. He has got access to category C and category D firearms, so category C — —

The CHAIR — Sorry, is this just the work that he has done? Is he saying this is the number of animals that in his work he has gotten rid of?

Mr SKEDD — Yes, on his own, working during the night predominantly. There are probably about 16 to 20 hours per month that he has worked using the category C and D firearms to control those animals. So there is well in excess of 1000 animals, and the invoice that he submitted for that job was — it is written there; how much was it?

Mr GRISE — It is 50 thousand.

Mr SKEDD — About 50.

Mr YOUNG — This is a very particular case, because we do not have the problems in Victoria with wallabies and possums which make up the majority of those numbers.

Mr SKEDD — True.

Mr YOUNG — Do you have something that is more of a general overview of Victoria and how many animals are controlled through your company?

Mr SKEDD — I am not privy to that. We would like to see some of the facts and figures that maybe Parks Victoria will have coming through. It is par for the course that we generally track the site survey, so the fauna survey — so how many animals are on a particular site — before we start. We track the number of animals that we have controlled, whether it be foxes or dogs trapped or deer shot, and then we like to do a fauna survey at the end of the job and then possibly in a year just to see a lot of the things we have noticed, say, controlling foxes. The native fauna respond in an area; you see a lot more possums on the ground or lapwing plovers on the ground when you have taken the foxes out of an area.

If you go to Phillip Island, there has been some fantastic work happen there with the penguin conservation. The lapwing plovers are in large groups, possums are 100 metres from trees, which you do not see in Victoria. This year a number of the possums that this fellow has controlled in that information which I have just handed to, we do not see those possums here in Victoria, and that is because of the foxes — introduced invasive species.

Mr YOUNG — So for Parks Victoria to have some of that done, you must provide a return to them for how many animals you have taken; is that right?

Mr SKEDD — You would think so, yes. Anyone doing work for Parks Victoria should have this information, and I do.

Mr YOUNG — We might endeavour to find out some more information from Parks then when we speak to them. How do you determine what method is best suitable for particular kinds of control of different species?

Mr SKEDD — Well, a lot of it is driven by legislation. So for foxes by far the best result for time spent and money spent is using a 1080 bait. There has been some really good involvements in 1080 bait delivery of recent times. It is known in America as an M44. They are known as a CPE in Australia, canid pest ejector. It is something we can put in the field, sprinkle over it and it delivers 1080 bait straight into a fox's mouth through a specific part of the two canids — foxes and dogs. That is a really exciting and good product to control numbers — good numbers — for a limited cost. In shooting foxes there are a lot of man hours. Sometimes the results are fantastic, but baiting foxes is many times more efficient in outcomes and dollars spent.

Mr YOUNG — What about sambar deer? What would your recommendation be for the best way to control them?

Mr SKEDD — Again it is legislation that is controlling what we can do in Victoria particularly. You can only shoot them. There is potential for other means of control of sambar deer, but you would have to go to the government, like CSIRO or the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. They would have that information on what they are developing, I would say.

Mr YOUNG — Can you offer any advice on why we do not bait for deer in Australia?

Mr SKEDD — It is legislatively driven. It is seen as a bit of a negative by some in New Zealand, where they do use 1080 bait to control deer, but it is probably desperate measures over there. New Zealand is a particularly unusual environment, because there were no mammals apart from bats in New Zealand until man got there and started introducing them. There were only birds, and mammals were the whales and the dolphins. All the mammals in New Zealand were introduced by man. So you can use the 1080 bait because it will not affect the birds generally — it will only benefit them by taking the predatory mammals away — whereas in Australia we have got a lot of mammals, marsupials, which would be affected by large-scale deer 1080 baiting. It would be quite negative, I would imagine.

Mr YOUNG — Just as a point here, I would love to meet the man who shot 30 sambar deer in a minute — that is, one deer per 2 seconds — with a 20-round mag and including a reload.

Mr SKEDD — I could have him in front of you in an hour. His name is — —

Mr YOUNG — That would be a very, very interesting conversation.

Mr RAMSAY — Sounds like a stand-off.

Mr RICHARDSON — They can get a selfie together.

Mr SKEDD — [REDACTED]. There are two fellows I spoke to this week who have done similar things with their category D firearms — [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They both, using these firearms to control sambar deer, routinely knock off 20 to 30 in a couple of minutes, if that.

Mr RAMSAY — I just want to refer to your submission where it states:

The recent deer control trials conducted by Parks Victoria using recreational hunters also demonstrated that up to date techniques and equipment were not seen to be utilised. Members of our association and other professional vertebrate pest managers also showed disappointment and frustration at being excluded and having valuable funds diverted away from them for poor outcomes.

The CHAIR — What page is that on?

Mr RAMSAY — It does not have a page number, unfortunately, but it is in the submission — third page. I refer to your comments about the ADA receiving \$5.3 million of government funding, yet they told us in their submission they received \$75 000 over four years as a government grant.

Mr SKEDD — It might have been a separate grant.

Mr RAMSAY — So you are telling me in all — —

The CHAIR — I think that was the deer association, not the shooters.

Mr RAMSAY — I did not say shooters.

The CHAIR — Sorry.

Mr RAMSAY — I said the ADA. The evidence we received was that they received \$75 000 over four years. I did not actually ask the shooters — and I wish I had, given the opportunity, but I will put that on notice.

Mr SKEDD — We have got a newspaper report with those figures, if we can hand those across.

The CHAIR — Could you table that for the committee, please?

Mr RAMSAY — The point being, though, that in your submission you are saying that you are disappointed that recreational shooter organisations like the membership of the Australian Deer Association and Sporting Shooters receive government grants but that the money they receive is being diverted away from the professional shooters, who have much better outcomes and better equipment and are able to target the species better than the recreational hunters.

Mr SKEDD — That is right.

The CHAIR — Just on that document — again, because it is all verbal — this is a document which is the *Victorian Country Hour*, so it is a radio transcript. It is ABC Rural, from the *Victorian Country Hour* by Bridget Fitzgerald, and it is dated 20 April 2016. Sorry to interrupt.

Mr GRISE — So you will see at the top of the bottom third:

The state budget will also include \$5.3 million for efficiency and safety improvements for game hunters.

Funds will support the Australian Deer Association to carry out controlled culls of invasive deer species.

Mr RAMSAY — But that is a little bit different from the ADA receiving \$5.3 million. That is a budget total, and part of those funds might be given to the ADA, as I read it. It does not suggest that they are receiving \$5.3 million.

Ms WARD — No, it does not.

The CHAIR — Maybe, as you say, a question on notice, so that we can clarify the amount.

Mr SKEDD — So \$5.3 million ‘for efficiency and safety improvements for game hunters’. Okay, so that is overall for the state.

Mr RAMSAY — Yes.

Mr SKEDD — Right, okay.

Ms WARD — Yes, but not necessarily to the ADA is Simon's point, I think.

Mr SKEDD — It does mention the ADA.

Mr RAMSAY — No, it does.

Mr SKEDD — 'Funds will support the Australian Deer Association to carry out controlled culls of invasive deer species'.

Mr YOUNG — Don't believe everything you read in the news.

Mr RAMSAY — I will seek clarification from the ADA, but I just wanted to put on the record that, while you said in your evidence that the ADA receive \$5.3 million, you have tabled a communication through the rural press that indicates the total state budget is \$5.3 million for efficiency and safety and that funds have been allocated to the ADA, of which we do not know what.

Mr SKEDD — If they are not straight to the ADA, it would likely be something similar, like the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia would receive part of that \$5.3 million.

Mr RAMSAY — Did you receive any part of that \$5.3 million?

Mr SKEDD — No.

Mr RAMSAY — And that is your grievance, is it — that the recreational hunters are receiving funding through that program?

Mr SKEDD — People doing things for sport, a pastime or recreation should probably be paying out of their own pockets or their own collection. I do not know why the government is handing over such large funds to people who do things recreationally and seem to be not supporting government departments like Parks Victoria, which are stripped to the limit and reducing what they have done historically for vermin control. How much are they dipping into sambar deer control in Victoria dollars-wise next year? It would be fantastic if the \$5.3 million was going to professionals to carry out this work, rather than people who do it as a hobby.

Mr TILLEY — So the association was formed in 2009?

Mr SKEDD — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — Coming from a number of private businesses, so it is a representative body of a number of private registered and licensed businesses.

Mr SKEDD — Yes, Birdwood pest control. It was set up because we saw this sort of thing as a trend that was happening, and it was frustrating a lot of the professionals — guys that have been doing fox trapping, such as Kevin to my left here. He does a lot of fox trapping. He is one of the better fox trappers in Victoria. There are guys who do wild dog trapping, deer shooting and rabbit control — I do a fair bit of that — who are missing out on what they had been doing for the previous years because their employers, like Parks Victoria, were saying the funds were not filtering through to our guys. They were starting to be a bit concerned that the writing was on the wall and that the Sporting Shooters and the ADA were getting more and more and we were getting less and less.

Mr TILLEY — So aerial baiting for wild dogs: do any of your members participate in that?

Mr SKEDD — One of my members supplied some baits. They formulated the baits that went into that program.

Mr TILLEY — Would have got a good drink out of that, your membership.

Mr SKEDD — Well, it was a competitive tender that you had to go for, so it was only a small component overall.

Mr TILLEY — Yes. I suppose what I am trying to get an understanding of is avoiding a them-and-us. You have got legitimate licensed shooters who recreationally like to go out there and shoot and hunt, and the professionals — you know, that is their business and that is their livelihood.

Mr SKEDD — It is.

Mr TILLEY — So are you saying there is no place for recreational shooters in any pest management.

Mr SKEDD — No, we are saying that we do welcome it — it is actually in my submission.

Mr TILLEY — Okay. I am just getting it clear, that is all.

Mr SKEDD — to work together to get environmental outcomes and maybe to work collaboratively where there are opportunities for the Sporting Shooters to come and do some of the works. There is a big difference between a guy who might go and shoot a few times in a month to someone who is doing it 10 hours a day every day. They have time on the trigger. The guys that do the work, it is not a motive for them. They are doing a job.

We have been told — and this is only hearsay; I do not know firsthand because I have not received any data — that the bulk of the deer taken were males, stags, and a couple of females. What that does is that improves the genetics in the population out there. It improves the wild herds of deer overall because you have got fresh genetics coming through with the younger males, which now have got a greater opportunity with the old fellows gone. So that improves the genetics of the wild herd.

Mr TILLEY — That is not to say in the relationship between professional shooters — or whatever method is used — and recreational shooters that recreational shooters are not professional in their own game themselves.

Mr SKEDD — Well, yes, they could be. There are codes of practice that the professionals abide by — *Ground Shooting of Feral Deer* is a code of practice. We have to follow all the protocols in the codes of practice as a bare minimum. We have to have competencies. There is a whole gamut of programs that we generally need to comply with before we can get any work with the government departments. We have to have done humane use of firearms to control vermin and pests courses. We have to have very tight, constrained insurance, lots of training, proficiencies and all the licences that we need as commercial contractors.

Mr TILLEY — But that would not be anybody that would be able to have those proficiencies. You would not be able to overcome that, you know, and if you were a recreational shooter and apply the same to those, but they would not be able not to pass those tests.

Mr SKEDD — No, they probably would not have too much trouble passing them. Some of the tests that are gone through — the humane use of firearms to control animals test is pretty tough actually. My guys spend a lot of their time on the trigger, so they are pretty good shots. But again we recognise that some of the Sporting Shooters guys are excellent shots as well. But when you do it for a living and you are out there to control numbers, to get the numbers down, it is a job at the end of the day. You do not get overexcited when you see a massive, big male deer walk in front of you. He is just the target; you take him down humanely and professionally and move on.

Mr TILLEY — That is where I am at odds with you somewhat — this claim of professional shooters that they spend a lot of time, energy and effort in their art. I am coming from a defence background. I have fired everything — machine guns, semiautos. I have knocked off a lot of things that probably would not make any records. It does not say that I am any bloody good at it, but what I am saying is there are people that spend significant money in our economy and spend a lot of time on the range zeroing their weapons.

Mr SKEDD — Yes, they do.

Mr TILLEY — And they are just as proficient as anybody else out there, professional.

Mr SKEDD — It is a big difference, though, when you are looking at a bit of paper down the range than it is to hit — —

Mr TILLEY — Yes, a moving target, environment, shape, size, colour — all those sorts of things. Yes, I appreciate that.

Mr SKEDD — a live animal, a small doe, a fawn. You need to take the little guys out of the herd. That is the only way you are going to benefit the environment. You have to take them all out. As a professional, it is just a job. You are there to achieve numbers. Your heart rate does not go up when you see an animal that is — —

Mr TILLEY — Why would you say that to a recreational shooter? I am trying to get to the partnerships and the claim of exclusivity — that just because you are a bloody professional shooter makes it that you do not get an adrenaline dump, you cannot hit a target. I am still trying to separate that.

Mr SKEDD — It can be hard for a sporting shooter to hit a fawn. It is not an easy thing to do — a little deer — but it has got to happen for the benefit of the environment. There is a lot of damage. Reading through the submissions that have come in to this committee, it is pretty evident that the environment is in big trouble. So you have got to remove these invasive species.

Mr TILLEY — So this is where I am coming to, the taxpayer. As legislators developing public policy, we should be spending the taxpayers dollar to pay professional shooters to look after our invasive species problem. That is what I am getting at.

Mr SKEDD — The professional shooters are good at getting outcomes.

Mr TILLEY — And you are saying that recreational shooters are not?

Mr SKEDD — They would struggle to have the same efficiencies as the professionals can.

Mr TILLEY — All right, so as legislators and public policy-makers, if we would open up more land to do a number of things in the way we detail, the things that restrict legislatively our recreational shooters — if we can change that, they would be very competitive with professional shooters, would they not?

Mr SKEDD — If they are doing it for free, yes — potentially. But it all has got to be measured. I think it should be measured by a third party, a party that has got no interest in either side, getting out there and comparing apples for apples. I would like to see that happen.

Mr TILLEY — But what I am saying is: should it be or should it not be an exclusive industry?

Mr SKEDD — Everyone should work collaboratively with the environment in mind, so we should not be out there favouring anyone except the Australian environment. We need to get outcomes. But to compare one to the other, we know that professionals get some pretty good outcomes quite cheaply.

Mr TILLEY — The point I am trying to make, Cameron, is that recreational shooters can probably have the same outcomes if, as public policy-makers and legislators, we make some recommendations to the government of the day and they were to change that. The taxpayer would not have to stump up and spend so much money and take it away from our health services, our emergency services, but we could potentially spend less money.

Mr SKEDD — How much money has been spent in the last year for sambar deer control?

Mr TILLEY — Not a lot.

Mr SKEDD — So it is time to bite the bullet, but you have got to spend the money with the right people. We are not out there to do anything but improve the lot for the environment.

Mr TILLEY — What do you mean by the right people, Cameron? I am not being combative with you, mate — —

Mr SKEDD — I understand that.

Mr TILLEY — I am just trying to tease this out so we can come up with some good recommendations and some good findings for this committee.

The CHAIR — Can I just ask, which might go to this question: has your organisation been consulted or has it been involved in any of the discussions around some of these programs?

Mr SKEDD — Very little.

The CHAIR — Because maybe that is something. So you have not been brought into any meetings or — —

Mr SKEDD — Not by Parks Victoria and not by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. The Invasive Species Council are talking to us quite regularly, and they are showing a lot of frustration from their perspective.

The CHAIR — But they are not a government department.

Mr SKEDD — No.

The CHAIR — I suppose it just seems a bit strange if your organisation has an interest that the department is not speaking to all interested stakeholders to try to get some understanding of how everyone could work together.

Mr SKEDD — Yes, what is really concerning is that the money is going in the wrong direction. The money should be spent on getting outcomes. Our guys can provide outcomes. Let us get some contracts out there. Let us have people hit the ground.

The CHAIR — And you are not opposed to working with other organisations as well?

Mr SKEDD — Not at all. It should all be measured by a third party to see what the results are for the dollars on man-hours spent. That way you can make decisions going forward on what the best pathways are to get the results for the dollars spent.

Mr YOUNG — For that to happen, we would need to see some data on what the outcomes you are providing are.

Mr SKEDD — Parks Victoria get all the outcomes for the work we do for them. Military bases get all the outcomes for the work we do for them.

Mr YOUNG — You do not have that information?

Mr SKEDD — I do not have it at hand, but I can request that going forward.

Mr YOUNG — I think that would be very helpful for the committee, if you could.

Mr SKEDD — The Sporting Shooters and the ABA provide similar reports and surveys.

Mr RICHARDSON — Thank you, Cameron, for your time. Just going on from Bill's point, particularly with the deer that is being taken out of Victoria at the moment, the estimations are around 50 000 per annum from recreational hunting. What is then the threshold that you are looking at from your association? Has a measure been undertaken by your association of what the number should be or where

the level should be in terms of putting that to government? At the moment it is very fluid on what the numbers are, particularly on sambar deer, but we know that around 50 000 deer have been taken out of Victoria through recreational hunting. So are you putting forward what additional numbers should be taken out or pitching to government in that sense?

Mr SKEDD — The numbers taken should be relevant to the numbers that are actually out there. There should be surveys done to work out what the numbers are. There are other species in Australia, and they are guessing there are between 18 million and 24 million feral pigs around Australia. No-one really knows. It is the same for camels and foxes. No-one would have a clue as to how many foxes there are in an environment. Until you have an idea and until you do some surveying and get some good numbers, good relevant numbers, then you do not really know how many you need to take out of the environment.

Looking at the reports that have come in to this committee, the environment has got some pretty major damage — but you do not see the deer. Because they are operating under the cover of darkness, it is very hard to find out how many are out there. All of a sudden the numbers are becoming evident — car accidents, people seeing them during the day. The problem is there are no predators apart from man for sambar or other deer species in Australia. There is nothing out there controlling them. There not in an ecological system at all. They are on their own, just building and building in numbers. We need to find out what those numbers are.

Mr RICHARDSON — I take your point about people undertaking it for their people to our state. And then there are associations that are putting forward that they are effective in reducing those numbers from a recreational standpoint. I think the absence of that information is difficult for your association. You would probably welcome, then, a full assessment of some of those numbers.

Mr SKEDD — Well, that is right — assess the numbers. It is just when you mention the other benefits of the dollars spent by the recreational hunters in the local towns and international hunters coming to Australia shooting the game species that are the sambar there. Is that what you want or do you want to get some benefits for the environment?

Mr RICHARDSON — I think if you could have both outcomes, you could deliver an economic outcome for the state as well as protecting environmental assets — rather than allocating numerous taxpayer resources without measurables on the outcomes. I take your point about the outcomes being focused on for your association and your members, but if they are not quantifiable from your association, how do we know that those contracts have been effective as well? So if you had both outcomes, I think that is a good thing for the state, and where the state does not have to then allocate resources it is always good thing.

Mr SKEDD — It would be ideal if possible, but I do not know how that would work. You need to remove the deer from the environment physically. Otherwise the dogs will become a problem. They are a top-line predator that will scavenge on all of the carcasses. So if you go and shoot a thousand sambar there and leave them in the bush, you are going to breed dogs in that area, and that is going to be a detrimental thing for both the environment and agriculture — farmers. So you need to do things responsibly. Removing the deer carcasses would have to be one of the requirements if at all possible. That is not cheap, though. You have to look at the big picture.

Mr RAMSAY — Is that not a requirement now?

Mr SKEDD — I do not know what they are up to.

Mr YOUNG — Do your organisations remove all of the deer carcasses you control?

Mr SKEDD — Yes, my guys are set up with 200-metre cables, winches and slide trails.

Mr YOUNG — And what about other animals, like foxes and rabbits and things? Because they are baited. It is impossible to remove ones that are baited.

Mr SKEDD — It can be. But a deer carcass will supply a wild dog family for quite a few days, whereas a fox will not. It is only a carcass. It will not supply a feral dog. It will not be a resource.

Mr YOUNG — We have heard evidence to suggest that dogs do not actually feed on deer carcasses for days on end. They will come and have a bit of a bite and then nick off because they are predatory and not scavengers.

Mr SKEDD — I would like to see those. I would like to see a third party, like the CSIRO, make comment on that.

The CHAIR — Okay. Thank you for coming in and providing us with your submission and information. Sometimes as the hearings progress we might have some further questions. So we might write to you, if that is okay, asking further questions that we have not been able to put to you today.

Mr SKEDD — That will be fine — no worries. Thanks for the opportunity.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.