Addressing the threatening processes of invasive animals altering habitats and ecosystems on Crown Lands

Region under a potential and actual threatening process: Long Swamp within Ramsar-nominated area encompassing Discovery Bay Coastal Park.

Present issues:-

- **Pigs**: Within last decade, escalating pig numbers have emerged as a serious threat to wetland habitats along most of Discovery Bay (also into South Australia), despite Parks Victoria’s efforts to eradicate these animals. Although not proven, there is the rumour that non-permit hunters are restocking the porcine population expressly for hunting purposes. These rumours include active night-time shooters, including use of hunting dogs. So far, through lack of investigating agency night staff no one has been caught in the activities of introducing pigs or shooting them.

- **Impacts**: Classified as serious: The wallows and churning of extensive wetland edges has deleterious impacts on flora especially bulbous Liliaceae and Orchidaceae, including the many rare and already threatened species besieged under recent, continuing Coast Wattle invasion. It is rationalised that hunting enthusiasts may justify shooting to ‘keep pig numbers under control’ when in fact they may have members who deliberately introduce further pigs to maintain the status-quo of recreational shooting. There is the added problem of sows breeding at this present time (visually noted by locals and visitors), which may add to the justification for legitimate shooting parties.

- Socially, it appears that ‘hunting is perceived as primarily a traditional and cultural, male prerogative and right’ argument. The adverse impacts on the ecology of the area are not recognised by these firing-range proponents or are dismissed as ‘unproven’ unscientific’ etc.

- In fact, there is a group of would-be hunters who presently argue that the DBCP should be a field and game hunting reserve and have made recent endeavours to prevent a Ramsar listing for this unique limestone karst wetland ecosystem. There is at this time a request by these shooting advocates to establish a clay-pigeon shooting range on a Nelson coastal property owned by Malcolm Thwaites partner, Karina Kelly, which land lies directly adjacent to the nominated Ramsar site. Whether the application for this recreational pursuit will be granted has yet to be decided by the local Glenelg Shire. Mr Thwaites has publically intimidated government agencies (Glenelg Hopkins CMA, EPBC personnel), environmental groups (Great South West Walk, Coast Action Network, Nelson Coastcare Inc.) and local identities (who wish to remain anonymous at this time) should they object to the firing-range application; the consequences of these actions has caused community fear, controversy and social division. As an example, the Nelson Coastcare volunteer’s group consequently decided not to object to the proposed firing range, despite being fully aware that the firing range proposal may have significant problems that need to be considered adjacent to a Ramsar site. These include noise in a pristine area, drop in local regional land-
values; use of lead shot and possible future live targets. There has been an unsubstantiated
rumour that the firing range would become functionally similar to that of other commercial
‘game-reserves’ where deer, wild turkeys, pigs, goats attract a wide range of hunters willing
to pay big money to shoot trophies. These ‘game-reserves’ apparently have club houses that
cater to supply visitors’ needs.

**Deer, Goats, Rabbits, Foxes and Cats:** Although pigs are presently the most serious feral problem,
deer numbers have been building up in recent years. Goats have been present in the Moleside area
for at least two decades, but new sightings have been recently observed closer to the Hedditch’s Hill
area. It can be assumed these animals will in time gradually infiltrate further into the DBCP.

In conclusion, the feral animal’s impacts on habitats that sustain our native flora and fauna are at
serious risk. Methods to control their numbers have barely kept numbers to a manageable level.
Lack of sufficient funds and field-workers has contributed to escalating feral numbers.

My personal concerns regarding community hunting organisations, is mixed: -

- using community hunting organisations has risks, even despite hunting protocols with
  assured strong compliance measures to ensure public and non-target wildlife safety;

- There may be a place to use professional hunters as employees of government agencies
  whose job specifics are to hunt feral animals in crown lands. How this is balanced with the
  public using these same areas is a quandary; past incidences include unintended human
  casualties;

- Partnership of community hunting drives with management agencies such as PV. could be a
  practical solution where a measure of oversight and control by agencies can be applied. This
  would become an area in which workshop tuition, and stringent qualifications would be
  needed to expedite safety OH&S standards.

- Whichever way, there has to be more funding and agency on-ground personnel available to
  reach successful outcomes. Avoiding mismanagement and lack of management in
  controlling feral animals whilst juggling community sentiments over ‘cruelty’, removing or
  controlling traditional ‘sporting’ hunts is the harder problem to tackle. In the meantime,
  feral animals are steadily increasing as do the voices of those demanding shooting ‘rights’ on
  crown lands, whilst our declining biodiversity is not being adequately protected from future
  extinction.

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