Submission to the Inquiry into The Control of Invasive Animals on Crown Land

The purpose of this submission is to briefly highlight the benefits of community-based hunting programs in controlling invasive animals on Crown land and propose some changes which would increase their impact.

Victoria has a long tradition of hunting on Crown land which brings many benefits to the community. It provides tens of thousands of Victorians an opportunity to participate in their chosen sport; it provides a significant economic boost to the Victorian regional economy; and of particular relevance to this inquiry, it assists with the control of the listed species of concern. Recreational hunting is already a safe, flexible element of Victoria’s approach to invasive species management and has the potential to make a far larger contribution if it is effectively managed.

Current methods of invasive species control on Crown land can be positioned on a sliding scale of cost and management complexity. At the high end of the scale there are the programs that are run by government departments and may involve some contracted support. These provide the maximum level of control, but are prohibitively expensive on a large scale, such as is the case with the State’s large tracts of Crown land. Moving down the scale a little, are the partnerships between departments and recreational hunting groups, such as the program to control deer at the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve. These programs provide a suitable level of control to operate in sensitive areas, however, they still require significant resources from the department and are limited in their ability to expand. Next along the scale are areas of Crown land with location specific restrictions such as parts of the Alpine National Park and, at the lower end, general access areas such as State Forest, which are managed through hunting legislation and regulation. The majority of recreational hunting occurs at the lower end of this scale.

The programs at the upper end of the scale have merit in select areas, but their costs and organisational complexity restrict their widespread use, limiting their impact. Recreational hunting on Victorian Crown land has demonstrated an exceptional safety record and in the more than 30 years of hunting in the Alpine National Park, it has also shown that it is a very low impact activity that happily co-exists with other park users. Proposals to address invasive animals on Crown land should therefore, be focused on methods which will increase the level and effectiveness of recreational hunter participation; increase the positive community by-products of recreational hunting; and minimize the resource burden on government. To this end, the following proposals are made for the Inquiry’s consideration.

Expand the role of the Game Management Authority (GMA) to include the recreational hunting of invasive species in Victoria

Currently the GMA’s functions focus on the hunting of declared game species. Expanding their role to include the hunting of invasive species will enable the organisation with the most experience in recreational hunting to manage the hunting of invasive species on Crown land and facilitate activities in the important boundary areas between Crown land and private property. This will provide the government a mechanism to gain the maximum benefit from community based programs.
Expand the Alpine National Park hunting program to all suitable national parks and other Crown land

Over the last 30 plus years, recreational hunting in the Alpine National Park has demonstrated itself to be a safe, low impact activity. This program should be expanded across all Crown land including national parks. Where there are areas of sensitivity or high public use, small areas around the particular site should be restricted from general hunting access and a coordinated program implemented to prevent a safe haven for invasive animals from being established.

As a guiding principal, recreational hunting of invasive species should be allowed and encouraged on all Crown land where there are no sound reasons for exclusion. Examples of land that this could immediately be applied to, include the remaining areas of the Alpine National Park including wilderness zones, Snowy River National Park and Errinundra National Park.

Expand the species that may be hunted within national parks to include invasive species

Presently only sambar deer are permitted to be hunted in the Alpine National Park. This restriction clearly works against the control of invasive species and should be removed.

Allow the use of gundogs on all appropriate Crown land including national parks

Currently recreational hunting of deer in the Alpine National Park is restricted to stalking only. Using a gundog to hunt deer has become an increasingly popular way of hunting and increases the probability of success. This method of hunting was expanded to all deer species in the Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012 and these changes should be applied where ever it is allowable to hunt on Crown land.

Expand the use of scent trailing hounds on Crown Land

Hunting with scent trailing hounds is one of the most productive forms of hunting. It is regularly used for deer as well as other invasive species such as foxes, rabbits and pigs with very high success rates. There are many hunters within Victoria with the knowledge, skills, resources and desire to use this very productive hunting method on Victoria’s invasive animals. Any program to control invasive species on Crown land should maximize the use of this community resource.

In summary, recreational hunting of invasive species on Crown land is a safe, effective community-based element of a comprehensive control program. Not only does it reduce the resources which the government needs to apply to the problem, but it also provides significant economic benefits to regional Victoria. The proposals outlined above would significantly increase the contribution of recreational hunting to invasive animal control within Victoria, while increasing the parallel benefits to the community.
Notes

[1] There were 47,007 hunters licensed to hunt game in Victoria in June 2015:
[2] It was estimated that licensed game hunters spent $417 million in 2013, 60% in regional Victoria:
[3] It was estimated that recreational hunters took 50,112 deer during the 2012-13 season:
[4] Three quarters of farmers surveyed used recreational hunters to help them control deer:
[5] The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report into Australian sports injury hospitalisations 2011-12 did not list hunting or shooting as a separate as the rate of injury relative to other sports was so low:
[7] Recreational hunting of deer has already been recognised as low impact and is currently allowed in some wilderness areas: