

# **ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land**

Bright — 19 October 2016

### Members

Ms Bronwyn Halfpenny — Chair

Mr Tim McCurdy — Deputy Chair

Mr Simon Ramsay

Mr Tim Richardson

Mr Bill Tilley

Ms Vicki Ward

Mr Daniel Young

### Staff

Executive officer: Dr Christopher Gribbin

### Witness

Mr Bob Gough

**The CHAIR** — We might get started on this first public hearing in Bright. Welcome to our first witness, Mr Bob Gough, and also to members in the public gallery. Thank you for attending today. This hearing is to hear evidence about the control of invasive animals. Before we get started we have to go through a few formalities. I advise that the evidence that you give today is protected by parliamentary privilege but anything said outside the confines of this public hearing may not be protected by parliamentary privilege under the Parliamentary Committees Act. Also, all the evidence is being recorded, and there will be a transcript available that we will send to you for you to check for accuracy. Once you have checked the proof, it will be made publicly available.

Mr Gough, I invite you to start off with a bit of an introduction about yourself and then, as I think the secretariat might have advised you, if you are okay with that, about a 5 to 10-minute presentation. That leaves plenty of time for committee members to ask questions. We also have your submission with us, and we have read that. So thank you.

**Mr GOUGH** — Thanks. Good morning, committee members, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Bob Gough. A quick bit about me: I am a retired army officer and have been involved in hunting all my life. I have brought those army skills across to this Parks Victoria program. I was involved with a conservation and pest management program with Sporting Shooters. I brought that into north-east Victoria. I trained a bunch of hunters for that — about 80, I think. I designed the Australian Deer Association accreditation course for the Parks Victoria program and trained about 70 members of ADA for that. So I have done a lot in that space. I have a lot of opportunities to talk; I just get a bit tongue-tied — sorry.

#### **Visual presentation.**

**The CHAIR** — Is this your presentation that is up on the screen?

**Mr GOUGH** — This is my presentation, yes.

**The CHAIR** — Are you okay to do that yourself, or do you want somebody to help?

**Mr GOUGH** — Yes, I will be fine to drive that.

**Mr GOUGH** — The thing you need to know about me is I have Parkinson's disease, so if I stutter or stumble or get a fixed look on my face, do not worry about it, because I am not worried about it.

**The CHAIR** — Okay, sure. Thank you.

**Mr GOUGH** — Just quickly, the photos here, I just want to explain them. The background photo is some of the country we operate in up in the high plains. I would like to get the committee up there to show you how we do things. On the bottom left is me giving a brief to some shooters. On the top right is an electric fence that a farmer in the Mitta Valley put in to keep deer off his hazelnut crop. That is working very well, and I will talk about fencing as a management option.

Arthur Bentley and I, with the ADA, worked on a three-hind badge — I am wearing mine today — to encourage hunters to shoot more female deer. The way the situation is, we might need to up that to a 30-hind badge or something.

On the scope, I want to quickly clarify some of the safety and accountability of the program and the common procedures, because in reading some of the transcripts I am a bit worried that that has not come through yet. I want to talk about current management options on public and private land; the key issues that I see, and one of those is a need for a paradigm shift; and the benefits of volunteers. There is a lot of common ground, and I have got some ideas on effective management or measuring of volunteers.

As I was preparing all of this, the question came to me: could using volunteer hunters in managed programs be the turning point? I have got a military background. I was thinking about the Battle of Hamel, with Monash. They got away from the set-piece battles of the British generals of Haig, they used combined

arms — they combined all their options together and were short and sharp and really changed the face of warfare in that area.

Quickly, on safety and accountabilities, volunteers and contractors are trained to industry standard. I developed the training program. I took it from the industry standard, so I can guarantee that that is the case. We both also have \$20 million public liability insurance. You do not get to do anything like that on Parks Victoria land without that liability insurance.

We are fully accountable under law. If we breach criminal law in Victoria, we have the Game Management Act, the Wildlife Act, the National Parks Act, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act — seven acts of Parliament. We are accountable under all of those. We also comply with a code of practice for ground shooting feral deer, and we also comply with Parks Victoria's safety policies on fatigue, working alone and use of equipment. I actually helped Parks Victoria to write some of those procedures, to put them into volunteer hunter speak.

The common procedures in the alpine park program: that is the sign that you will see as you start on the walking track when you are entering the deer control area. It is an A4 sign. The park is not closed. Tour groups are formally advised. The response from people we have met — and we have only met a few — has been very positive and very supportive of what we are doing. The public seem to be quite happy — once they know you have done some training, they are happy to let you go. When I was up with the contractors there was a school group that came in and we all camped together, and they asked a lot of good questions.

The operators are briefed in detail on the protocols and procedures for safe shooting, so you get an experienced set of eyes over the area and we work out how we are going to hunt that. We work on that collaboratively with Parks Victoria, but Parks Victoria retains full oversight and full control. We are issued with Parks Victoria trunking radios and GPSs. We have regular radio schedules and we are GPS tracked. Every step we take on a program is logged, and that is all part of the post-cull monitoring catch per unit effort — CPUE — information so they know where we are. That is for safety and for that information.

Moving out of the park into all tenures, I always believe that effective management needs a sustained landscape-scale integrated approach. The history of Australia is that we have not sustained them and we have been fragmented in our approach. I do not feel the game status of deer is a barrier to management. The Governor in Council order for spotlighting on farmland is proof of that.

The options that are there and are and could be used are ground shooting. We know it is effective, but it is not the only method. I do not believe you can shoot your way out of this problem; I think we need other measures. Heli shooting we have used in Victoria for goats. In New South Wales national parks they are shooting sambar in the Kosciusko area, and the ranger I spoke to said it was effective and she was happy with it. Cost and tree canopy are the issues, but if we are agile enough, post hazard reduction burning and post a big fire, canopy is not going to be an issue. If we could find some money, then you could really have an impact. Electric fencing is good for your smaller properties — five strands, 1.5 metres high, with the bottom strand 100 millimetres off the ground keeps out deer. The nut grower — and I will show you photos — has proved that and is very happy with his fence. Tree guards and exclusion fencing are used widely in the US and UK. They have had deer for millennia. It is an additional cost to your grant, but it is an opportunity cost. If you want to do revegetation, you have got to protect against deer.

There are other options too — chemical deterrents. I have used Sen-Tree on my property. It is watered-down with PVA glue to make it stick. You mix in soap and egg powder, then you spray that on trees and sprinkle it with grit. It is a great browsing/grazing deterrent. It stops rabbits, wallabies and deer. It might not stop every one of them, but it has a really good effect.

Human scent is great for urban and peri-urban sites. I advise Trust for Nature and a lot of people on small properties. Human hair from the barber; get the barber's clippings — I have used that; it works very well — sweaty T-shirts, even your handkerchief. If you have got a tree that has been rubbed by deer or an

entry way where deer or foxes are coming in, you can hang a handkerchief there and that will really deter them well.

As far as cost goes, yes, I acknowledge it is a cost, but it is a cost regardless of game or pest status. In fact pest status throws all the cost onto the landowner, and it is an opportunity cost. If you want to have a nice garden, as the people in Mount Beauty did — before those fences went up you could drive along that road pre-dawn and see any number of sambar deer. Now they have gardens and you can see their trees are coming back. That is the nut crop at Mount Beauty. It is not that expensive to put up electric. It is more expensive than plain.

The key issues I see are that we need to generate social licence for this sort of program. We need to take ownership. To me, if you are impacted, you are a stakeholder. We cannot wait for someone else to do something. On carcass management, I have got some notes which I would like to explore after the presentation if that is all right. We need measures and metrics because the scientists tell you that. We need to collaborate. To me, the best way to get all those key issues addressed, I would like to suggest, is that we create an invasive species working group. I can see government people and other people rolling their eyes and saying, ‘Another committee I have to go to’, but if we got all those people there — VicPol, game management, DEDJTR, the hunting organisations, the Victorian national parks, the professional hunters, Landcare — and it does not have to happen every week, there is a lot of common ground and it breaks down a lot of the barriers.

We need a paradigm shift. I am a big fan of Pat Parelli, the horseman. He says that if you always do what you always did, you always get what you always got, and I think we are seeing that in wildlife management in Australia. I think it has mired in introduced species by some dogma and there is a paralysis of analysis. Everyone says you need more research, but what research do we need? I know parks need to do research on the damage and the impacts of deer up in the park, that is for sure. I think we need research into toxicants, but as a hunter I have everything I need in my head to control deer. We do not need to research how to make hunters more effective. We know that, and we can teach that. I think we need to cut through the noise and just ask, ‘What can we do right now and what’s stopping us?’. Also with volunteers, how can we shape volunteer hunters to achieve our mission?

Just quickly on volunteer hunters, we have got a lot of different skill sets. I am qualified in field firing ranges. I can look at a map and say it is safe to put hunters in there and deconflict that with other areas. I can do all sorts of stuff like that, and I am just one. We have got lawyers and policemen and all sorts of other people. We have got really diverse skill sets and we can bring all those together. We want to collaborate because we want to be part of something bigger than what we are. What do we get out of it? We can change negative stereotypes. It is great to bump into a bushwalker and have a conversation with them, and we can make a contribution to biodiversity. We can extend the reach of the programs as well. There is the low-value noisy miner program I speak about in my submission. It probably would not have got off the ground if it was a commercial one.

Pest or game, I think we should just call them what they are and manage them. I do not think we need to have a bias on them. I do not think we need to demonise animals. I think we are setting ourselves up for failure if we do, because we have native animals on a pedestal when they can also become an issue. On humaneness, everyone agrees that there is a good code of practice there and we use it. On sustained control, everyone agrees about that. Recreational hunting is not wildlife control and is not what we are doing in the park, but we have got to acknowledge that the Victorian recreational harvest is the longest running and most cost-neutral wildlife program in Australia. It has an economic effect and it must have an environmental effect. How we manage that is a challenge. To me, who else is going to take 60 000 deer out of the environment every year? I think it is not an either/or situation with recreational hunting, volunteers and professionals, poison, exclusion fencing and everything else. It is not an either/or; I think we can do it all concurrently. It comes back to that, ‘What can we do now and what’s stopping us from doing it now?’.

To measure effectiveness, I would like to challenge stakeholders like the scientific community and DELWP and GMA to develop work or a measure for measuring the recreational harvest. A 10-minute

Google search for measuring volunteers comes up with a lot of good stuff, mostly being done in Canada and America. I think we need to work on focusing the recreational hunter effort and we have heard how we do that in New Zealand. I have seen it with fishing in Australia. If you want to crowd out a fishing spot, put an article in a magazine that says there is good fishing there and everyone will go.

I would like to improve hunter performance. I would like to challenge hunters to shoot more female deer, improve their skills and knowledge and attend hunter education courses, and to hunt more often and to shoot more deer. Carcass utilisation comes into that. Maybe I am being a bit cheeky, but with \$400-odd million generated in recreational hunting every year it would be great if we could allocate some of that as almost a performance bonus to the organisation that comes up with measures for this. Instead of just throwing it at the scientific community and saying, 'Here, scientists. Do that', what about some of the citizen scientists out there?

To wind it up, I do not think game status restricts management and I do not think it would restrict management in the future. We need to own it. We are qualified, safe and accountable. And I would like to see that invasive species working group going. To the question I posed at the start, 'Could we be the turning point?', I think the answer is yes. I think we are seeing it in all states except the ACT, where volunteer hunters are being used increasingly. So I think we can do it and I think we are doing it. That is all for the presentation.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. Both your submission and the presentation have been really helpful. They are a lot of food for thought. Maybe if I start with a couple of questions just on what you have presented and your submission. At the moment it is trials using volunteer hunters to try to reduce numbers of deer, for example. You were talking about how it is very safe and the training is there. But if you want to roll something out in a much bigger way, how do you think it is possible to maintain the same quality of training and the same safety standards and the cost of regulation and compliance in terms of that? Now it is small and compact, and everyone is looking at it, but if we are talking about doing it on a much bigger scale, how do you continue to have the same number of safeguards?

**Mr GOUGH** — And the interest in the volunteer community to participate in that too.

**The CHAIR** — Yes, the interest, the safeguards and the training quality. How does the Game Management Authority or whoever make sure that there is compliance?

**Mr GOUGH** — The hunters will self-regulate. We will weed out people, and we do that as part of the process. The ADA's process for attending the deer management program course is that you are an ADA member and you do our two-day residential course. That is a prerequisite. You do a 25-hour workbook, and then you attend the course. In that time we are weeding people out.

**The CHAIR** — Have people been weeded out?

**Mr GOUGH** — Yes. For a lot of people this is just too much hassle. We have got it very good in Victoria. We can go hunting most days of the year if we want to. If they do not want to abide by rules and regulations and they are not committed, then they will not join. As we progress on the training course you soon identify people. We have people turn up and their firearm handling skills are not good enough. We just tell them straight up. Usually if their firearm handling is not good enough or not safe, their marksmanship will not be up to standard, so they do not pass the marksmanship test anyway.

**The CHAIR** — Would it mean then that the training and the accreditation should always be managed by the Australian Deer Association as opposed to other organisations setting up training? At the moment just about anybody can register themselves as a training organisation. Is it your idea to not allow that to happen?

**Mr GOUGH** — I would not see any limit to that, but because the ADA and Sporting Shooters, the volunteers are coming in under their insurance — that is why they have to be members — that is what has kept it in our control. There are RTOs around that are training these competencies, mostly for the professional guys. That is fine if they want to do that. Certainly if they join ADA or join Sporting Shooters

and say, 'Look, I've done this accreditation', we do recognition of current competency and prior learning. We would probably test them on the practical things, the navigation and the marksmanship, just to make sure that they are up to speed until we can put eyes on them.

We are talking about 1 per cent of our membership, really. It is not a big percentage. Numbers-wise I think Sporting Shooters have trained well over 500, and the ADA has trained over 200 or more. You are talking big organisations, so there is not a lot of appeal to a lot of people. It is retired guys like me. It is people that cannot not volunteer who will get involved in it. Automatically we are stepping up. ADA has a couple of residential and non-residential training programs for recreational hunters. There are a lot of other providers now that are running courses to improve your skills for hunting deer. There are lots of opportunities. Sporting Shooters I know have got various clubs where they will induct you into the club and teach you the skills if you are a field hunter or if you are after small game or something like that. You can improve your skills that way.

Those are some good opportunities there. I often say regarding landholders and the private land programs that I will not recommend someone unless I know them. How do we get bigger than that? There is a lot of scope for more of these activities. Pretty much we have still got to know them, because we are putting our reputation on the line. If a commercial operator has an accident or something, he can drop out of public life for a while. He can change his business name or something like that. But we all know if ADA or Sporting Shooters makes a mistake on these programs, we are done. We cannot change our name. No-one wants to be remembered for that, so we keep a pretty tight rein on people that way.

**Mr McCURDY** — Thanks, Bob. I appreciate the presentation. Pardon the pun, but you said there is certainly no silver bullet in terms of being able to resolve this issue and that it will take a mixture of different remedies to try and solve what we have got. You have said the 3-hind badge should go to 30, so that sort of implies that things are getting well out of hand. What can the government do in terms of regulation or legislation that can help make it easier for the recreational shooters to turn that 60 000 into 120 000? We have heard examples like that silencers on guns would help when there is a heap of deer there. Instead of just pinging off one and the others all taking off, a silencer would help you to maybe get two, and that could effectively turn that 60 into 120. Are there any easy gets out there so that we could say, 'If we change this regulation or did this, we could actually increase and make the opportunities easier for recreational hunters'?

**Mr GOUGH** — For the volunteers in programs I think suppressors would be good. I have submitted a document with the briefing pack on that outlining a way it could be done. The average deer hunter who lives in Melbourne and goes hunting maybe two or three times a year might go hunting more if he could have better access, and that might mean parks might need to get more money to fix roads or something like that or that we start encouraging people to backpack in. It is a big thing in America to backpack in. They take horse treks and that sorts of stuff because they want to be comfortable. I am seeing a lot of movement in hunters where they want to do that whole wilderness experience, and they can do that now.

I think the current regulations and laws are working. I would like to see a bit more enforcement. I mentioned in my submission about arming the GMA, or at least giving them self-defence capabilities — pepper spray, tasers or something like that — so they can conduct independent operations. The feedback we are getting from farmers is that the biggest issues are carcass disposal, illegal activity and the increased incursions of deer. If we could do something to get that illegal activity sorted, everyone would get a better name and I think more people would take it up.

What other easy hits? With a couple of days to think about it I could give you 10.

**Mr McCURDY** — I am happy to take that on at any time.

**Mr TILLEY** — Good morning, Bob. As I have said earlier, and it is probably on the record of this committee, your submission is certainly a must-read. I think this committee by and large has paid particular attention to it. It is good to be giving you the opportunity today to orally present to us. Thank you, Bob, for all the work you have been doing over many years.

**Mr GOUGH** — Thanks, Bill.

**Mr TILLEY** — It is interesting, and you were exactly right when you spoke about the Battle of Hamel. In about 20 months it will be the centenary of that battle when we first saw armoured infantry and artillery all working together in combat. It was the start of the push back at the end of the first war. You are right on your history, and I really appreciate that. Talking specifically, can you just go into a little bit of detail about the problem in the public arena around perception? You mentioned carcass management. Can we just have a bit more of a conversation about some of your ideas about specifically how we go about that? Time and time again up here we hear, ‘We’ve found a carcass minus its head and backstraps and a couple of legs’. We are hearing that all the time. The problem is that in the court of public opinion that gets rise and presents us with all kinds of challenges.

**Mr GOUGH** — Yes, and that is a common thing. It seems like with every step forward we make with good perception there is someone out there who will drag us down. With carcass disposal, there is a lot of worry about carcass use by wild dogs as well. I will probably talk to both of those.

**Mr TILLEY** — Yes, please.

**Mr GOUGH** — I think on private land the simple solution for carcass disposal is to remove them from the farms and get them out of the way. Farmers have got to worry about wild dogs. I read a paper by David Forsyth, and I agree with his research. I know that dogs like to kill; they do not like to scavenge so much — I have even tested that with carcasses on my own property with foxes. Landholders are concerned, and if they are concerned, they are not going to buy in.

Under current law deer and kangaroo carcasses cannot be sold or traded, but I believe that under the Meat Industry Act, section 35, the Governor in Council may permit deer carcasses to be disposed of to knackeries. To me the simple way to do that is if you are going to have deer control on your property, the shooter or the landholder tees up with a knackery to pick it up, and I think an NLIS tag could be the way to go with it. They only cost about 40 cents each, the non-electronic tags. That tracks the carcass back to that landholder if there is an issue with a disease or something like that. They go to the knackery, the knackery is on-selling that product — it might be blood and bone or something like that — but he is not selling the carcass for sale for pet meat or anything like that. It gets the carcasses off the property.

Other options that I often talk to landholders about are digging a hole and burying them, or burning them. Some landholders are worried about them — some are worried about wild dogs eating the carcasses. Some are more worried about the deer eating the grass. Properties I shoot on, we will shoot deer and we will drag them into a pile and burn them up.

Another option I thought of was giving carcasses to dog shelters or hunt clubs, if you can get the dog shelters or hunt clubs to pick them up. The fox hunting club, Hume Hunt Club, has 30 dogs that they have to feed every day. If they get through a kilo of meat each, that is 30 kilos of meat a day. I rang them and asked them if they would be interested, and they were just knocking the door down.

**Mr TILLEY** — But how long can they feed their dogs on that? They would be going through them pretty quick.

**Mr GOUGH** — Yes, but they are out scouting for sick cows, and they are doing the best they can. We should probably talk about recreational hunters’ use of the carcasses first. If we could get a game butcher, because a lot of people are a bit scared of cutting up the meat — I just did it, and if it did not look good, I just put it in a mincer — and people are worried about butchering carcasses. If you live in a unit in Melbourne, obviously you cannot do that in your garage or something — people would be calling the police — so I think if you could have a game butcher, where you could take your deer to someone who is qualified, that would be a good way to encourage people to eat more venison, which would encourage them out to hunt a bit more often.

On the commercial side of the harvest, I think that is market driven. There does not seem to be a lot of interest. I think if it was going to be considered, PrimeSafe would have to have a big hand in that, because

we need to make sure the product is going to be safe to consume whoever the end user is going to be. I would be very cautious about a backyard venison market because it just would encourage people to jump fences and more illegal activity, and the safety side of it is a worry as well. That is probably about it on carcasses. I think if you had a heli cull or something like that, it is a big pile of meat that is going to rot quickly. If you did it post-fire, it will be warm and it will rot quickly; it will not be a big food source for wild dogs.

**Mr TILLEY** — Off freeholding and those permitted hunting areas in state parks and small parts of national parks, with a drive of wanting to gain more access, with the carcass management on that side often you hear those stories that they are too big and heavy to carry out. How do we find a recommendation or public policy on developing how you manage that — on getting hunters to take out what they shoot?

**Mr GOUGH** — Yes, to carry out what they shoot. It is on our hunter education course with the ADA. I taught on that for 13 years, and it is part of the hunt that we bring it in. The whole thing is part of the hunt. You have shot the animal, now the hard work starts. We teach them how to break a carcass down and carry it out. We have a butcher there, and he shows them how to cut it up. We actually produce DVDs for sale to our hunters and members for that, and we cannot keep them on the shelves — everyone seems to be interested in butchering their own game meat and carrying it out.

I think if a hunter is dedicated enough to go into an area, he is probably dedicated enough to bring it out. The challenge we have now is on the private land, in all honesty, where we would go out and shoot 7 or 10 sambar in a night. It sickens you to waste the meat, but it is what you have got to do — we have only got so much freezer space, so we take what we can. If we could gift it — in America they give venison to the homeless people. I would like to do that sort of stuff in Australia, but there are a whole lot of regs — fair dinkum regs too, you know; we do not want to make people sick. I think there are a lot of opportunities to explore with it.

**Mr YOUNG** — Cheers, Bob, for coming in. I will just echo Bill's sentiments about the work you have done — it has been a fantastic submission, and it has been really helpful. Just quickly, while it is fresh in our minds, you talked about people bringing carcasses home to the city and being unable cut them up in their garages and there being no available way for them to do it — when you go to a boat ramp there are some pretty fantastic facilities for cleaning fish at cleaning stations and stuff like that. Do you think if those were strategically placed in places popular for hunting, you could have something like that? A roof over your head, a little cleaning station, somewhere to do a bit of butchering and prep?

**Mr GOUGH** — Yes, that would work well. I had not actually considered that because I just do it by habit myself. When I lived in Wodonga my neighbours got used to seeing me hose my driveway off, but that is Wodonga, that is country, that is not Melbourne.

**Mr TILLEY** — It is acceptable.

**Mr GOUGH** — Yes. There are plenty of good stops where you could just have a sign and a little J-hook so you could go in and the public would not see unless they deliberately want to drive down the track to see. That would be good. It would have some offal disposal and things like that.

**Mr YOUNG** — On the way out of the bush — it stops people taking the whole lot home. It might make it easier. Cool.

I have got a few things that I want to talk about with you. It is mostly stuff you have mentioned in your submission. I just want to explore your ideas on the argument for head shooting versus chest shooting. It has been suggested by other people who have presented information to the committee that head shooting is the best and most humane way to kill a deer. There is contention about that idea. The whole point of it is to have the cleanest kill for the least amount of effort to actually retrieve the deer after you have shot it. Could you just explain to us why we are taught to chest shoot?

**Mr GOUGH** — Certainly. I read some of the other testimony about this, so I did a bit of a comparative chart, which I am happy to send in. The PestSmart code of practice says head or chest shots. I describe them correctly as brain shots and heart-and-lung shots. Kangaroo shooter protocols describe head shots with a chest shot if the headshot does not work, but they want a whole carcass and they want it to drop on the spot so they do not have to look for it, because they are on the go all the time to pick up a more carcasses. The aerial shooting code of practice for feral goats prefers chest shots over head shots for moving animals because of the large target zone. That is why I have always recommended chest shots or heart-and-lung shots, especially on deer.

I hope to get the committee up to the park to see what we do. You can look through a thermal device and see what our picture of a deer is. The first thing you see is that the head never stops moving. These are animals that butt and fight. Their head is naturally domed; it will ricochet a bullet quite easily. I have got a photo where a deer was shot in the head — a frontal brain shot, and perfect position in a spotlight with a high-velocity rifle, a .22-250 — and it survived. It had a big scar down its head. It knocked it flat, but it got up and ran away. It did not kill it. It did not even penetrate. I have heard of other instances where head shots have gone wrong and blown a jaw of a deer, and the deer has suffered for a month until someone else came across it.

So for those reasons — a deer's brain is probably the size of an orange and it is constantly moving — yes, professional shooters do it. I know RSPCA recommends it. The two times I have done it were very close and both required a follow-up shot. One was at 10 metres. I thought, 'Yep'. All I could see was the deer's head in a bush. I knew it was a deer; I could clearly see his head and his antlers. I took the shot, walked over, and the deer stood up and started walking away. I was a half inch off.

**Mr TILLEY** — That is not like you, mate.

**Mr GOUGH** — So your chest shots are far bigger. I am doing some research with another hunter. We call it a bang-flop study. We are doing research on hunting situations, where we shoot a deer and from where the deer is struck to where it drops, we will measure the distance. How far did it go? So with a round through the heart, with a round through the chest, with a round through the spine, did it run 5 metres, 10 metres, 20 metres — did it move far? I have done two head shots and had to follow up. I have done any number of chest shots. I would probably shoot over 50 deer a year, and they go down. They often do not drop where you get them, where you shoot them, but you can find them; they are within 5 or 10 metres. So that is my preference for it and that is what I have taught hunters for a long time. There are so many variables and you have got the opportunity to double or triple your target area. Why would you not take a safe shot? And the code of practices recognises that as well.

**Mr YOUNG** — Thanks for that. The other argument that we get put all the time is that professional shooters are much more capable than recreational shooters in as far as their accuracy. Also that they have a higher moral fibre has also been suggested quite often, as opposed to some of the things that are said about recreational shooters. Could you give us your opinion on the ability of professional shooters versus your experience with most recreational shooters and their actual capability of making an accurate shot, whether professional shooters are for some reason far better and far more capable than recreational shooters?

**Mr GOUGH** — Sure. My experience is I trained a lot of hunters, as I have told you, and I lectured on a hunter education course and on a bunch of other hunter education courses. I spent a night with Wild Strathbogie Wild up on the high plains at their invite. I served with the guy who runs Wild Strathbogie in the army, so we knew each other and we have talked about this sort of stuff for years. So I met him and the other two guys, and I know another professional shooter as well. I think marksmanship is an individual skill. It is a perishable skill. As I said, I have got Parkinson's disease — it is a movement disorder — but I still pass the test because I practice. All the guys that fail the test, there is a 33 per cent pass rate in those courses for the parks program. The guys that do not pass, it is because they do not practice enough.

Professional shooters certainly do a lot of shooting, so they are good shots because it is their occupation. They would get over the nerves a lot better because they are more experienced. But experienced recreational hunters who are very experienced and knowledgeable would get over the nerves as well or

they would not take the shot, and that is basically what we teach the recreational hunters. I always teach them that you get the deer's target zone — we call it the ethical range — where the target is about 8 inches or 200 millimetres. So you practice at that, and you practice all the field positions: standing, kneeling, lying down. If you cannot get all of your shots — not four out of five, all of your shots — into that kill zone in that position at that range, then you do not take those shots. You practice until you do. Commonly with recreational hunters my main criticism would be that they do not practise enough. But practice is a tough thing. It takes away from your hunting time. Most of your engagements, especially with sambar deer, are very close. I would say the majority of mine are well under 50 metres — if not, certainly 100 metres — so you have got a bit more margin for error. But I think if anything I would encourage hunters to practice more often, because all the professional shooters started out as recreational shooters.

**Mr YOUNG** — The other thing that I want to talk about is something that you mentioned in your submission that I found very interesting as far as focusing recreational hunters, because we have had a lot of people present evidence to say that hunting is ad hoc and for that reason it does not work as an effective control. But you have started addressing the issue by suggesting that focusing hunters to a particular area or a particular species or certain things like that, or even particular sex of species, can be a way of addressing that and take away the ad hoc nature of recreational hunting. What we have seen, though, is an argument that the GMA is a little bit restricted by way of their legislation and the way the authority is actually formed in what they can and cannot do. I take your comments about when you want someone to fish out a hole, you tell them there is good fishing there and everyone goes and does it. That might be well and good by fisheries, where they are allowed to actually promote fishing and get more people involved and encourage them, but from what we see from the GMA they actually step back from that promotion idea because they believe the legislation does not allow for it. So what are your comments on that, and should the GMA get more involved in that space and actually start pushing the message and focusing hunters in that way?

**Mr GOUGH** — I certainly would see that as a role for the GMA. I think that would be a quick hit legislatively if their legislation is holding them back from that. When they started the GMA I applied for one of the jobs there and I was almost successful. I got an insight. I know a couple of the GMA rangers and I spent a couple of days in the car with them, and I got an insight into their job, and it is a very tough job.

In New Zealand, where I have hunted, from the minute you get off the plane the customs guy who is checking your firearms, says, 'Oh, you're going hunting? Where are you going? Yeah, I've been there. Try this gully up here'. When you walk into any gun shop or you walk in to get your licence in the Department of Conservation office, they say, 'Where are you going? Oh, yeah, try that there; that is good there. Talk to the ranger'. When you meet a ranger when you are out in the bush, he will say, 'Yeah, try that gully. I was up there last week and there are deer there'.

I think unwittingly the New South Wales game council did it when they started their ecological deer management, when they started limiting access to some of the parks. I think straightaway that generated a feeling among the hunters that, 'Hey, there's something special in there, so I want to go there more often'. Whereas I actually see the dispersed nature of Victorian hunting access as a strength. Sure, the effort is spread but so is the risk. You have got huge deconfliction.

There are popular areas like Wonnangatta Station — there are always people going into Wonnangatta Station — and Wonnangatta-Moroka junction. Around here there are a lot of places where people will go, and the word will get out and they will go there. I think hunting organisations have got a role to play in that as well. The big plus in Victoria is there are no secret spots. In Queensland, people will not tell you where they go hunting — the same in New South Wales and a lot of the other states — because they have worked hard to get that access to that farm or whatever. But in Victoria because it is public land, it is like, 'Oh, yeah'. When I first joined the ADA: 'Come hunting'. You would get an invite. You meet them at a meeting. So it is a very open situation, yes.

**Mr YOUNG** — You would not be saying that if we were talking about quail shooting.

**Mr GOUGH** — No. Quail is probably different. I do not even know how to find quail access myself.

**Mr YOUNG** — And it is the same thing for me. If I knew, I would not tell you.

**Mr TILLEY** — I am back again, Bob. I would like to cover off on things. It is significant we have spoken about hunting, but in your submission you make mention that a single control method would always fail and certainly other methods, including baiting and trapping at the same time. Also there is a bit of fencing stuff that you spoke about. We just want a bit of commentary from you around those other activities, if you could.

**Mr GOUGH** — Sure. Before I get into toxicants, I might quickly talk about trapping. I have been talking with a couple of landholders about trapping deer. I think it has got a real use in some places like at Harrierville. We went out and met people at Harrierville.

If you have got a deer trap, rather than a hunter who comes when he can, you have got water and food in there for the deer. It is not a cage; it is a paddock. I am talking 10 acres or something, if you have got it. The deer come in. I saw this in New South Wales — it worked really well — where a farmer had a 200-acre paddock with an old homestead site with fruit trees that were attractive to the deer. There was a deer fence right around it on steep slopes. He had a couple of ramps, where the deer would jump in but could not jump out. When he had a truckload, he would just call the truck up, stick them on a truck and sell them. That worked really well.

Under the current regs in Victoria, if we could get a deer trap going, and the landholder then rings up his shooter and says, ‘Look, I’ve got some deer in a trap’, and the shooter comes out at a good time when it is not going to upset the neighbours, like in the middle of the day when they are all at work or something like that, and puts the deer down, it is probably a good way to go. I am looking into trying to find a grant. I would like to find a Landcare-type grant to trial it on a farm. We obviously have a lot of ground to go; we have got to make sure we can do it legally first.

On poisoning deer, I have got to say I am really challenged by this. But you have got to accept it is a waste of a resource — it is a great food resource and it is a great recreational resource. But there are areas where hunters will never go. It is just too expensive to put helicopters in or do other methods. I think poisoning is an option there. In my research on it so far, I have done a fair bit of research on poisoning deer, because there are always comments about pindone and rabbit-baiting programs and killing hog deer in the hunting clubs. I wanted to knock that down. I went to a wildlife conferences a while ago and spoke to the people who make pindone and said, ‘How much pindone to kill the deer?’. I think it works out at 3 kilos a night over three nights to kill a 40-kilo deer. With 3 kilos that means a 40-kilo hog deer has got to eat about 5 kilometers of bait trail, so straightaway the hunters did not have an argument. There is a sublethal dose worry, but if the programs are conducted at the right time for hog deer, especially because they have a closed season, do not do pindone baiting programs close to the open season and you are safe.

On the toxicant that would be lethal for a sambar, I think 1080 would be lethal for everything in the Australian bush. I am not a fan of 1080; it is a horrible death. There is a new toxicant out called sodium nitrite, and I have put some papers in the reading pack about that. It is used as a pig bait. I spoke to Invasive Animals CRC, and they said it is a really good way to go. It converts haemoglobin into methaemoglobin, so you basically suffocate. Death within 90 minutes. Symptoms only last 30 minutes, and the symptoms are choking, not the thrashing about that you see with 1080. It is non-residual, and they claim that you can actually eat animals that have been poisoned with this. But it needs a species-specific delivery method, and I think that is possible. You have got the logistics of bringing that in. What are you going to do if you get a big pile of carcasses and things like that? But that is also another consideration.

**Mr TILLEY** — There are some challenges absolutely on that. Just changing the subject a little bit, it is about the proliferation of deer numbers and those sort of things. You have certainly done some Bogong High Plains trials, camera trials and those types of things about monitoring deer numbers. Can you give us a comment in relation to what your ideas or your findings are from those things, about the proliferation of the numbers of deer in the high country and those other areas that you have experienced yourself?

**Mr GOUGH** — We did pellet counts at Falls Creek probably 10 years ago. Faecal pellet index analysis, it is called. This is another use of volunteers. A whole bunch of hunters went up there. The parks guys gave us GPSs and way points. You sample along the transect to see how many pellets you have got, and you do that at the same time of the year five years in a row and you get a measure of relative abundance. At the time, 10 years ago, parks said, ‘Look, deer aren’t an issue at Falls Creek’. They are now.

Because I am a local, because I get on really well with the parks guys, they let me look at the camera images, the pre-cull camera studies, and I am doing some spreadsheet analysis of that. These cameras are set up to take three photos every time they are tripped, and I say that before I tell you that I looked at 12 835 images over a 12-month period. That sort of narrowed down about 4000 images of deer. Because you can identify a stag by his antlers — hinds are hard to identify — I individually identified 36 males — 36 individual deer over 12 months. When we went around 10 years ago we saw two in the spotlight and we had next to no pellets. So 36 males and 14 females.

That also goes back to your question, Daniel, about people saying that we only shot stags up there and we were stag-focused. If there are only stags up there or there is a predominance of stags up there, that is what you are going to have in your harvest. I can tell you the guys are not stag-focused up there. Certainly in the Wilsons prom cull, we are not allowed to harvest for antlers either. We do not take any of that home. We take the meat home and that is it. So no-one is going to have any trophies on his wall because he got special access.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks. I have a few other questions, too. But if you do not mind, can we write to you if we have any other questions?

**Mr GOUGH** — Sure.

**The CHAIR** — It is just that we are running out of time and we do not want to keep other people waiting as well. We really appreciate your coming in and talking to us today, and I think everyone on the committee acknowledges that the information you have provided is really valuable for us and our deliberations. Thanks.

**Mr GOUGH** — No worries. I am happy to be involved and happy to help. My wife is happy that I am not bending her ear about it!

**The CHAIR** — You were talking about a chart, I think, when Daniel asked you a question, and you said you could probably give it to us. So even if you do not have it now, could you perhaps send it to us or email it?

**Mr GOUGH** — I have got a copy and I can email a copy to Christopher.

**The CHAIR** — Maybe for the transcript we might just explain what that document is.

**Mr GOUGH** — Sure. It is drawn from a presentation by a veterinarian, Matt Dreisner, who is a keen deer hunter. It is just a table that compares the effects of brain shots and chest shots on deer. It talks about the location of the target area, the dimensions — side, front and rear — the effectiveness, the positive and negative aspects of it.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks very much.

**Witness withdrew.**