

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

## **Subcommittee**

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

Sale — 7 October 2016

#### Members

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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

#### Witnesses

Mr Luke De Boer, and

Mr Russell Sharman.

**The CHAIR** — We will now commence the public hearings for today and welcome everybody to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land. Thank you to Luke De Boer and Russell Sharman for coming in today to provide us with a presentation and an opportunity to ask questions. I will just go through a few of the formalities first. I think the secretariat would have spoken to you. Are you okay with presenting for about 10 minutes or so and then giving us a chance to ask questions after that?

**Mr DE BOER** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — In accordance with the parliamentary committees legislation, when you are in the public hearing you are afforded parliamentary privilege for what you say, but of course anything that is said outside this public hearing is not covered by parliamentary privilege. What you say will be recorded and you will be given a copy of the transcript proof just to check it for accuracy prior to it becoming publicly available. Thank you again for coming today and I will hand over to you, Mr De Boer. Perhaps if you could just give a bit of an introduction to yourself and your background before talking to us about the matters.

**Mr DE BOER** — Okay. Thanks very much. Obviously I am a local from this area. I live in Maffra, not far away from here. I am 39 year old, a tradesman — an electrician. I have been hunting sambar deer since I was 12 years old, so on and off I have had about 27 or so years experience. Due to a hectic work and family lifestyle, I do not really keep up to speed with events and this sort of scene as such. I am not a member of the ADA, but I still go hunting. I probably represent a lot of the more shy people who just are not, you could say, politically minded, I suppose, and are just out hunting.

With regards to hunting, I enjoy both styles of hunting, with hound hunting and also deer stalking. I am an avid hunter of both, mainly in local areas around here, but I have hunted anywhere from the Thomson River, the Thomson Dam area, all the way through to Dargo, the Nunniong high plains, Omeo, Benambra, up to Cann River. Most recently I have been over into northern Victoria — Harrietville, Bright, the Buckland Valley area.

With regard to this submission, when I wrote it I had no idea about the terms of reference. It was only after I had written it that Russell made me aware of them. So what I thought I would do is just go through my submission and at the end try to address those three terms as best I can.

**The CHAIR** — That is fine.

**Mr DE BOER** — The first thing I would like to cover is what I have sort of witnessed with regard to deer population growth. In the last 10 years I have seen a massive increase in most areas where I go. Initially it excited me, just for the hunting opportunities, but as it grew and grew I sort of came to the conclusion that it was a bit concerning. One common theme with the population growth, or what coincided with it, was obviously the fires that we have been having throughout Victoria. Basically I put it down to the fact that sambar deer, being opportunistic breeders, have taken advantage of the ideal conditions with increased feed in the bush, and they have just bred basically to the numbers that they are now.

To put it in perspective, I can give you an example. When I was roughly around 18 years old I started hunting in the Dargo area, more specifically the Crooked River catchment. I was hound hunting. There were days when I would walk around all day and not find a deer. What I mean is I would not find a fresh track that a hound could pull scent from and start. Now it is pretty much impossible to walk in the bush without finding one. We have certain gully systems that we hunt, they are not huge systems, but at the start of every season you go in there and there are just heaps of deer; they are everywhere. I estimate, just through the numbers that we have taken out of some these areas — and constantly there are crews there every couple of weekends — 100-plus deer would be taken out of this area. The following year you would go back at the same time and there would be just as many. I do not think they are breeding and repopulating the area. I think it is just basically the national parks which are nearby are feeding the state forests with deer.

Another example is that recently, when I went into the Bright-Harrietville area, we hunted an area north-west of Harrietville. Basically you could say if you were standing at Harrietville looking up to Mount Hotham, all the state forest is on the western side and on the left-hand side of the Hotham–Harrietville road is all national park. I hunted with a new crew there and on one day we took 14 deer. I was amazed at how many were there. From what I have seen, there are more over there than on this side. Once again, fires have been through the area, you could tell, and not that long ago. After getting onto the CFA website I could see that it was around 2013 when the fires went through there. This was mid-July this year. The crew that I hunted with informed me that on that day they shot their 200th deer for the year, and they estimate on average they will shoot 300 to 350 for a season over there — and that is just one crew.

With regard to Harrietville, I spent an afternoon down at Harrietville having a look around the town, because I had not been there before. I talked to some of the locals in the pub, and they are having big problems over there. One poor chap had had his veggie garden cleaned out the night before. Another house I noticed has a big box hedge at the front, and from about 5½ feet down it has been eaten out. I just noticed deer marks everywhere while walking around the town. Unfortunately for Harrietville, with all the national parks, there will probably be an endless supply of deer coming into their town.

Now, regarding my proposal, or my opinion, I think simply we need to reduce the numbers of deer in the national parks. A lot of the state forest is already, with the hound hunting in those areas, being managed, but the largest breeding colonies of deer are obviously in the national parks, and each year they keep repopulating, as per the example I just said, the state forests. So as hound hunters we cull as many deer in the state forest as we can, and we do make a good difference.

**Mr SHARMAN** — It can make a difference, yes.

**Mr DE BOER** — But if there is no hunting in the national parks, or reduction in the national parks, then there is no point, if you want to reduce overall numbers. Currently in national parks, as you know, only stalking is allowed, between a certain date in December and February. However, stalking is not a high-cull-rate type of activity, and a lot of stalkers, such as myself — if I hike into a national park, I am looking for a trophy animal; I am not looking to shoot a lot of deer. Hound hunting, on the other hand, has by far a lot higher success rate in the culling of deer, in reducing numbers. Hound hunters generally are more, when they hunt, indiscriminate; they will shoot any deer that their dogs are trailing. Of course they are lured to areas for trophies, and they like getting trophy stags, but that is more of a bonus as such.

At the moment, as you know, hound hunting in national parks is illegal. To be honest, if we were still hound hunting like we were 20 years ago, I would not recommend it — going into national parks and hunting. But now the scene has changed. I will make three points in regard to what the difference is now. First of all, approximately 12 years ago foxhounds were banned with regard to hound hunting. This was mainly because foxhounds are very fast, they were deemed to be more aggressive than other breeds, and the hound hunters were in less control of the hunt. Now, breeds that are allowed are bloodhounds, beagles and harriers. Bloodhounds, for example, are a large dog but they are lot more passive and gentle, you could say. They are a lot slower in the way they hunt, and, as you know, beagles are very small and they are a lot slower because they have just got smaller legs. Harriers, be it a little faster, are just a more passive animal as well.

This change, at the time, personally — we had foxhounds at the time — upset me because we could not use them anymore. But in the last 10 years I have noticed that hound hunting is a lot more — how would you say?. You are in more control with the hunts now. There are a lot of guys who would still want foxhounds, but I personally prefer what has happened, that change. The second, and probably the most important, is the introduction of GPS tracking systems. I have a couple of props here, if you are wanting to have a look at some stage.

**Mr YOUNG** — We love props.

**Mr DE BOER** — This is probably the latest model GPS tracking system. In utilising GPS tracking systems, it is very rare that you will have a dog that is lost overnight. Whereas previously when I first

started hunting you did not have tracking systems. You relied on basically an educated guess where your lost hound was, and then basically someone would be seconded to be waiting for the next day or so. You would be basically tracking roads, looking for dog tracks, trying to find your dog.

Now with the GPS tracking systems, at an end of a hunt if you have lost dogs, you just go to a high point and get on your tracker, and I have picked up dog signals within 10 kilometres away. It will give you a GPS-marked spot on an actual topographic map where it is. You can make the decision at that time: 'Have I got time to walk in and collect that dog before it is dark?'; or you can go in there in the morning and pick them up. On average, this year, for example, I think we have had one dog left that we had to pick up in the morning, and we knew exactly where it was at all times.

The third point is, basically, the fires. The fires have simply made the bush a lot thicker, with a lot more undergrowth, and this would hinder stalking — or it does, pretty much, because you just cannot see that far. It is an advantage for the deer to hide in. Other methods — and by no means am I an expert — with helicopter culling like I have seen in New Zealand and stuff like that, I just do not think it is possible in a lot of these areas. Even with human drives, where they use lots of guys walking through a system making noise, in a lot of those areas it is very hard to walk through now, so you would be at a big disadvantage there.

On the other hand, with hound hunting it is almost like an advantage for the hounds, because it is harder for the deer to walk around the bush and to run through the bush. Also with regard to the hounds, because they are smaller, they can still push through that scrub quicker, and the scent that is left by deer, which used to be some marks on the ground, is now like a channel of scent, so to speak. It is easier; they just perform better, if you know what I mean. So it is more of an advantage than a disadvantage for hound hunting. That is why I think in this day and age hound hunting would be a good fit for having a go at controlling numbers in national parks.

In my submission I sort of had two proposals: one for deer, and like a phase 1 and a phase 2 sort of thing. That is all I could think of to suggest. This is probably how I would see an example, but it could take many forms. First of all, I would possibly initially allow like a trial run in a certain area. To take it a step further, I would probably try to promote a more congestive style of hound hunting. What I mean by that is if you have a certain area in a national park, instead of just allowing hound hunting in general, maybe separate it into blocks so you can cram more hunting crews into an area as such. You already have a lot of highly experienced hunters out there, and if there was an opportunity to hunt in national parks, they would automatically be lured to do that. It would be an incentive for them to go there. That is just simply because it is untouched country, there is a dense population of deer, and there is a lot higher chance of securing trophy stags as well.

Depending on how you coordinate it, how it was set up, it would be not much cost to the government at all. Basically the hound hunter would pay his way for an opportunity to hunt in those areas. He is already up there at the moment hunting in state forests, so there is really no extra cost to him to go there, and it would be a better place to go. So they would automatically just go there to hunt.

On the second part of the proposal regarding dingoes, foxes and cats, I am no expert on controlling dingoes. I often talk to a few of the dingo trappers in the area just to get a layout of where their traps and baits are set so we do not hunt in those areas, but it is only a suggestion that, unlike methods like poisoning deer, if you are hound hunting deer you know exactly where those deer have been culled, and with your tracking system and your GPSs you can mark those points so you know exactly where those deer are.

Now, you would probably have to talk to a dingo trapper to see if there is an advantage, but I personally think you could use the information on where these culled deer are located. Once an area is hunted you could use those GPS-marked deer carcasses as points to lay traps for dingoes and foxes and cats. Obviously once you have left an area, if they are in there they are going to be attracted to those carcasses. This method would be something that could be repeated, so basically you could hunt an area, whether it is for a weekend, a week, two weeks or whatever, and then you could move out of that area and go

somewhere else; and then a dingo-trapping campaign could subsequently be put in place. This process could be just repeated everywhere over time.

That is pretty much my submission. With regard to the three terms of reference, I am no Rhodes scholar, but I will do the best I can in trying to decipher them. You can help me, if you like.

**The CHAIR** — What you have contributed in your submission and today already still fits in within the terms of reference anyway. I mean, it is not that strict.

**Mr DE BOER** — Okay.

**The CHAIR** — It is about coming up with ideas and suggestions, which you have done, which is really great, about how to deal with invasive animals. So do not feel that you are — —

**Mr DE BOER** — No, no worries. The first one was:

1. assessment of the biodiversity outcomes, community safety and limitations of the trial conducted by Parks Victoria on control of deer populations in a national park ...

With regard to your reference trial, is that like the trial that I heard they did in the Mount Hotham area? Is it a specific trial?

**The CHAIR** — It is a trial, I think, with the recreational shooters association to allow, I suppose, volunteer hunters, but there is a certain training program and there is an oversight and all that sort of stuff.

**Mr DE BOER** — Okay.

**Mr SHARMAN** — That would be Wilsons Prom and Yellingbo and so forth.

**Mr DE BOER** — Well, the one I heard about in the Mount Hotham area, I think, was more of a stalking-type campaign. As I said before, I think with hound hunting you would have greater success.

**The CHAIR** — Sure.

**Mr DE BOER** — I probably should touch on a local example of the effectiveness of hound hunting and how I have seen population decline. In the Freestone Creek and Valencia Creek area, which is north of Briagolong here, we do a lot of hunting there because it is very close to where we live; and being family people now we have limited time to go anywhere. Prior to mid-2000 I used to do a lot of hunting there, and it was quite difficult to find deer. They were there, but they were not in big numbers. Once again, there were times when you would walk around all day — and there would be 10 people — and you would not find one fresh enough to start.

But I think it was around 2007 that we had a lot of fires. I think they started at around East Licola and they were pretty bad. They went through the Avon wilderness, the head of the Valencia Creek area, the Freestone Creek area and all that sort of top pinnacles area. They came down this way but they were not as severe. I think at the time, from memory, there was a lot hotter weather for a few days and then it started cooling down and it was more of almost like a fuel reduction burn one once it got down here.

That happened obviously in a summer period, when hound hunting is not allowed. But what I noticed the next season when we went up into our local areas was that there were huge amounts of deer. The only way we could explain it was they had been displaced out of this national park and the way the fire had moved it had pushed them all down. The season prior we would, once again, struggle to find deer and we might have got one or two deer a day; and then the next season we were getting four or six deer a day in this local area. So we basically went from a tally of, say, 30 to 40 deer a year to where we were pretty much touching 100, 100-plus, and climbing.

But then word obviously got out on Facebook and social media and more crews turned up. It took about three years, so three hound seasons, before I started to notice a decline; and then it was probably another

two to three years before we got to a point where we started to look elsewhere again. It is still not at the pre-fire sort of population; there are still more, but — —

**Mr SHARMAN** — It has had an effect.

**Mr DE BOER** — It has. We have had a fairly profound effect in the culling of deer in the area. I thought either we had shot almost all the deer or they had moved again. Personally I do quite a bit of reconnaissance, you could say — I do a lot of walking around — and I actually went and had a look in some of the national parks, just for a look, just to see what was happening. Yes, there were deer in these areas, but they had not bred up, so I could only surmise that we had made a dent in the population; they had not moved back as such. And the country, because it had burnt so bad — and we are talking from 2007, so it is a long time — it is still pretty bad; you know what I mean, it is very thick. That is an example of an effect we have made just in this area.

This term of reference in regard to community safety touches on that. I had a good think about this. With regard to hounding in national parks, obviously if you put people with guns in a national park there is risk. There is obviously risk; if someone is carrying a gun there is always risk. But you could probably define it as shifting risk or moving it. What I mean by that is at the moment you have got hunters in state forests. As soon as you open up the national parks they will go into national parks, so you are moving the risk. And to be honest, we already coexist with bushwalkers, four-wheel drive clubs, motorbike clubs and campers in the Dargo area, for example. So there is already risk there and it is managed, and you are just moving the hound hunters into national parks, so I do not see an increase in risk. If you were using a method, say, hunting behind a closed gates season, you would actually be reducing the risk because all the hunters would be behind closed gates — you know what I mean?

**Mr SHARMAN** — It may be the ideal time to trial hound crews in those areas because they are closed off to the public, so half your job of managing the public is done.

**The CHAIR** — Yes. Because we only have limited time, I wonder if there are a few other points you want to race through. There are a few questions that we would like to ask.

**Mr DE BOER** — I have pretty much almost finished.

**The CHAIR** — And if there is anything else that you can think of, we are certainly open if you want to send some more information in.

**Mr SHARMAN** — Could I add something on the safety element? I am not sure whether you have got it there. Hound crew leaders take a lot of pride in managing the hunt. I suppose it is not a selection process, but they generally do not want dills that can put anybody at risk. Everybody has a UHF radio, and if any members of the public happen to come into that area everybody is made aware of that. So there is a lot of effort put into risk mitigation. The hound crew leader also coordinates the movement of hunters through the radio, so that two hunters cannot bump into each other from opposite sides of a deer and shoot each other. That is just a real-world example of how the risks are managed and how we interact with the public. Now that we are family men, we do take a lot of pride and we see the point of view of the family camped on a riverbank, and making a point of driving in and saying, ‘Listen, there might be a hunt coming through this way. Don’t be alarmed. We know you are there’, and those sorts of efforts.

**Mr DE BOER** — You only have to get on Google and search ‘old hunting pictures’ and then ‘latest hunting pictures’ to see a stark difference between hunters. They used to wear brown Driza-Bone coats.

**Mr SHARMAN** — And look like a deer.

**Mr DE BOER** — Now they all wear hi-vis.

**The CHAIR** — Okay.

**Mr DE BOER** — The safety has increased over the years. It is partly because of awareness, but also there are just a lot more hunters out there.

**The CHAIR** — Just on that — and this is just based on some of the submissions and some of the comments that people have made — the information we are getting is that there are a lot of well-organised, responsible hunters, but then there is the story about someone in Jamieson carving up a carcass and leaving it near the school bus stop. You get these sorts of stories. I guess because it is a new idea, we have to make sure that we allay any fears in the community and ensure that they are not worried about things. I guess when we are talking about extending to national parks, you have to regulate because a ranger could say, ‘You are not allowed to be there; that is the end of it’, rather than, ‘Are you a good hunter or a bad hunter?’. Have you got some ideas about how perhaps we might be able to regulate that system or make sure that it is safe and that people feel safe?

**Mr SHARMAN** — In the highly sensitive areas there was a supervised hunt with the ADA and Parks Victoria. That is the extreme of how you deal with extremely sensitive areas. If we were allowed to broaden our territory, that has to be taken into consideration, but something in between what we are doing now and a fully supervised hunt would have to be looked into.

**The CHAIR** — Okay.

**Mr SHARMAN** — We do not want to see any of that bad publicity either —

**The CHAIR** — Of course.

**Mr SHARMAN** — because we enjoy our sport and, like anything, a small percentage of people doing the wrong thing could ruin it for everybody.

**Mr DE BOER** — Bad news travels fast, as they know.

**Mr SHARMAN** — Especially these days.

**The CHAIR** — Yes, with social media.

**Mr SHARMAN** — Expanding deer numbers, expanding hunters, is good for a lot of things, but your percentages of something going wrong could increase, and that is why we are interested in an input here.

**The CHAIR** — Okay. So it could be done under the umbrella of an organisation or association?

**Mr SHARMAN** — Well, we sort of have that. The GMA are into policing the whole thing.

**Mr DE BOER** — I think they would take the burden, if you could call it that, of organising and coordinating. Something that just popped into my mind this morning was if you were hunting behind closed gates and there was a known camping area or a bushwalking track like the national trail, you could just mark those areas off as no-shooting zones — not no hunting, but no shooting, as in 100 metres each side of that track there is not to be a shot fired. Hunters have GPSs on them so they will know exactly where that is, and you would not place them in those areas. It does not mean a hound cannot trail a deer through that area; it is just that you position your hunters so if there is going to be a bushwalker walking that track, they will not see you. There are ways of doing it. With technology now there are ways of segregating people. Do you know what I mean?

**The CHAIR** — Okay, thanks.

**Mr RAMSAY** — I have a couple of quick questions. In relation to the dogs themselves, the foxhounds, do they tend to attack an animal, or are they just more robust in their sort of pushing and hunting?

**Mr DE BOER** — Touching on what I said earlier, foxhounds were banned.

**Mr RAMSAY** — I understand that. I am wondering why. Are they more pushy? Are they more attacking?

**Mr DE BOER** — The foxhounds are a more pushy dog. You could call it pushy. So they are a lot faster.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Aggressive even?

**Mr DE BOER** — Some of them could have been, yes. I personally did not experience any of that, but I did hear of incidents of that happening, and that is why they changed. They banned the foxhounds and they went for more passive breeds like the bloodhounds. Are you familiar with the term bail, like the bailing of a deer in a hunt?

**Mr SHARMAN** — Surrounded or corralled by the hounds.

**Mr RAMSAY** — I have sheepdogs that do that to sheep.

**Mr DE BOER** — Yes, you could say that. So a deer, a big stag, for example, tend not to panic as much, from my experience. They are older so they are not as fit as a younger male, so they might run for a little while, then they will decide to stop and sit or stand in a river and to defend themselves, because they have antlers as well. With bloodhounds and beagles, if they get to that deer they will just sit there and bark at it, basically. We have got some that, unfortunately for us, will just leave it and walk away because the party is over for them; they are about the trailing of it.

**Mr RAMSAY** — So how do you envisage, if there was quite a big cull, removing the carcasses? I know you suggested using some carcasses as bait for wild dogs and cats, but invariably there will be more carcasses if you are doing a large cull using the hound hunting.

**Mr DE BOER** — First of all you are right; I envisage there would be lots of carcasses. If you wanted to put a subsequent baiting program in, it would be pretty futile if there were just carcasses everywhere, if you know what I mean. Personally I do not like wasting the deer myself. I like to get them out of the bush.

**Mr SHARMAN** — Utilise it.

**Mr DE BOER** — Yes, utilise them as such. It depends. You can hunt areas where you can position people near tracks, and because you have got a lot of people there, at the end of the hunt you can just carry those deer out. That is an option.

**Mr SHARMAN** — Which is different to a stalking scenario, where it will be an individual who has walked into a hunting area and he is limited then to what he can do. He will take out as much as he can, but if he chooses to shoot three deer to help with reducing the numbers, he is not going to take most of that out. But in a hound crew scenario, as the word ‘crew’ says, there are a lot of people there to help, and that mitigates those issues.

**Mr DE BOER** — Yes. With six or seven guys you can pretty much almost pick a deer up and carry it out. I am not talking a kilometre as such, I am talking, you know, 100 metres or something. We are only human. But it depends how far you would want to go.

In New Zealand, when the venison trade was at its peak, they used to go around in helicopters and shoot nets over deer and retrieve them live. So if you were happy to spend the money and I do not know how many dollars an hour it is for a helicopter, you could just pick them up out of the bush, go to the nearest track and dump them, and then pick them up.

**Mr SHARMAN** — That is also why our method is quite attractive, because with other methods like poisoning you are going to get exactly that scenario: all the deer run off and die and you are going to have hundreds of carcasses lying in the bush. Our method is probably not perfect, but if you compare it to other methods like poisoning, you will get the same issue that concerns you.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Yes. Actually I was thinking more about adding value to the carcasses, like quick refrigeration and then — —

**Mr DE BOER** — I was going to touch on that. In the *Weekly Times* this week there is a story about a guy in the Swifts Creek area who is upgrading a kill room because supposedly there are rumours with regards to the wildlife regulations that they may be allowing sambar deer to be used commercially as pet food, so he is gearing up for that. You could use that in conjunction here, so basically with the deer that you take in the Dargo area, for example, you could set up some sort of coolroom, You have abattoirs down here; they could take a truck to Dargo for the weekend and just park it and you could just transport the deer to there and utilise them. We give a lot of venison away, obviously, because we cannot eat it all, so you could give it away. I do not know what the regulations are — whether you could do that or not on an own-risk basis.

**Mr SHARMAN** — Some people are grinning, so I do not think it is — —

**Mr RAMSAY** — Probably not.

**Mr DE BOER** — Yes, probably not. But if it comes to the point where it can be used as pet food, then, yes, you can get rid of large volumes of deer that way and utilise it. I totally agree with you; I would prefer to utilise it rather than just leave it there, for sure.

**Ms WARD** — On that point, as you like to utilise it, do you focus then as hunters on stags, or do you go to younger animals that are going to be more flavoursome?

**Mr SHARMAN** — Because our method is hound hunting and it is indiscriminate, at every opportunity, every time a deer comes through on the driven hunt, it is taken.

**Ms WARD** — So you do not let deer go.

**Mr SHARMAN** — So we deal with it as required. If a good-sized animal is taken, it is ideal for venison.

**Ms WARD** — So you would take any deer?

**Mr DE BOER** — Yes.

**Mr SHARMAN** — Well, our method that we have just been talking about — I think you dropped in a bit later actually and missed the introduction — is a little different to stalking, as Luke explained. All animals are taken.

**Mr DE BOER** — Ninety per cent of the time you would take all animals. On occasions I have hunted by myself with maybe one or two hounds, and I have ended up in a bailed situation, say, 3 hours walk in the bush. I will walk in there and I will actually just put the hounds on the lead, give them a good pat and let the deer go because I just cannot deal with it, if you know what I mean.

**Mr SHARMAN** — Deal with it properly.

**Mr DE BOER** — And do I really — what is the point of shooting the deer? Probably you could say it won and it is time to go. But 90 per cent of the time with a crew, though, they will take any deer that the dogs are trailing and any displaced deer that are moving out too.

I only had one more thing. I just wanted to touch on the cost side of things. There is a term of reference on cost. I know I touched on it. I just want to reiterate that if hound hunting is allowed in a certain national park, it will just automatically lure people there to hunt, just because of the benefits and the opportunities there, if you know what I mean.

Depending on the model that you want to use, whether it is utilising a helicopter to get deer out of the bush — well, obviously the cost goes up — or if you want it to be more supervised. If you went for a

congestive model like I was talking about, there would probably be a bit of planning and prep work where you would have to work some sorts of maps out and put them on the website that hunters can then use. You might have a balloting or booking-type set-up or arrangement. At the moment it is just whoever is there first gets the area, if you know what I mean.

The only reason I touched on a congestive style is that if you go into an area now, for example, let us just say that hypothetically speaking, the Avon wilderness area was open to hound hunting. I would drive up there on a Friday night and there would be a hound crew camped at the bottom, and they would say, 'We're hunting the Avon wilderness'. I would say, 'Okay, it's 20 kilometres long', but they would say 'No, we're hunting that', so I would have to go elsewhere.

The congestive style would mean it would be mapped, so every 5 kilometres, 10 kilometres, this certain ridge or anything, that is where the next crew can start.

**Mr SHARMAN** — It would be more thorough with systematic covering of the territory instead of big gaps — this area hunted and then a gap in between, which allows those deer to refill the gaps. It would be a more methodical approach.

**Mr DE BOER** — More productive.

**The CHAIR** — Do you think hunters would be okay with that? I think we have also heard otherwise because of the regulation, but I guess it is better than nothing; it is better than not doing it.

**Mr SHARMAN** — People like the freedoms. The current system is quite good really compared to other countries and places, and the freedom is what attracts a lot of people. They can just be themselves. So long as they stay within a set of boundaries everything is going to be fine. Some people may not like the idea of — you know, it depends what model is chosen — being fully supervised, but some people would like the idea that all they have to do is get a little bit organised and they can have a nice piece of territory that has never been hunted before. And it is not just about hunting, it is about the bush that we are in too.

**Mr DE BOER** — To put it in perspective, with social media, when I first started hunting it was very 'This is our patch, don't go here' sort of stuff. Now it is pretty much open slather with social media, and everyone knows where everyone is and everyone goes. A lot of the younger generation — gen X or whatever they are now — —

**Ms WARD** — I think you are gen X, mate.

**Mr DE BOER** — No, I am before gen Y — I still say 'Why me?' a lot, though. It is scary watching them in social media and just communicating. They are pretty much saying, 'We go here and we got this many', and then all of a sudden people are hunting there. Word gets out a lot easier. But they are all coordinating

**Mr SHARMAN** — It is not as much about rivalry anymore.

**Mr DE BOER** — There is no rivalry, there is a lot less — that is probably the word.

**The CHAIR** — So everyone is working together, which is what you need.

**Mr DE BOER** — Yes. I think in a congestive form, it would not be a problem. The old-school thinking of 'This is my patch, don't go here' is out the window now.

**Mr SHARMAN** — But you would not want them on top of each other. If you have a broad A, B and C block and people just go, 'I will do A', and the next crew might choose something else, it would still work in together a lot better.

**Mr DE BOER** — It is already sort of happening in areas like the Big River-Goulburn area, where you get a lot of hunters from Melbourne. They are hunting systems next to each other and they are already communicating. If their hounds go into the other crew's area they say, 'We've got one coming over, sorry

about that', and the others reply 'Okay, no problem'. They are more than happy for that crew to dispatch that deer for them. It is already happening.

**Mr SHARMAN** — Yes, there is a lot more cooperation than in the old days.

**Mr DE BOER** — I do not see it being a problem. I was only suggesting it to get more hunters in a space.

**Mr SHARMAN** — To be more thorough.

**Mr DE BOER** — So if a deer escapes a crew's area it is just going into another crew's area, if you know what I mean.

**The CHAIR** — Yes.

**Mr DE BOER** — And you get a lot of what are termed sneakers, as in displaced deer that are sneaking out. They will go into another area, or they will go past the hunter and get harvested as well, if you know what I mean.

**The CHAIR** — Yes. It sounds like a good idea. I suppose I am just covering all bases as to whether hunters themselves would be amenable to those sorts of ideas.

**Mr DE BOER** — Yes.

**Mr YOUNG** — I have got just a quick one, because we are running out of time. How has the culture changed over the years as far as being self-regulators and when people are doing the wrong thing, how is that accepted within the community?

**Mr DE BOER** — In my experience, especially with things like social media and everything like that, and with so many people in the bush, you just cannot get away with stuff; it is just as simple as that. Do you know what I mean? I have hiked into the bush, stalking and backpacking, and I still run into people on a Wednesday afternoon. It is just like, 'Where did you guys come from?'. So people are just adhering to the rules. There are always rogue elements in anything — do not get me wrong — but you might be able to weed those out somehow, if you know what I mean.

**Mr SHARMAN** — That is why the GMA are good, and they probably should be resourced well. It is because the current set of rules are working well, but humans being humans, if they start to blur the lines a little bit, you just need a nice group of people like that to just keep everybody where we are now, and it should be fine.

Another cultural change is deer have always been a game species, they were sort of respected and people only took what they needed. I worked with deer hunters 35 years ago, and this sort of talk would shock them. So there is a sort of culture, and it is still there, especially for stalkers, that they would not just slaughter a mob of deer just because they think they are doing the right thing for the environment in this context. I believe in New Zealand there is a little bit of a program to encourage people to shoot the females as well. I would not push it too far by encouraging everybody and saying it is now a cull, that it is not hunting. The respect still needs to be there for the deer, but we need just a little bit of a shift in the culture to assist in what we are now identifying as a bit of a looming problem.

**Ms WARD** — I want to quickly ask a question. With the GPSs on the dogs, would it be a mechanism to help track where deer populations are going and where they are going further into forests that are not accessible? Would it be a way of mapping the trails of the dogs via the GPS?

**Mr SHARMAN** — No. I know what you mean there, but I have got a friend who was actually interested in a program of fitting a GPS collar to the deer. Under these conditions the deer is just going to stay out of trouble, so it would not give you any accurate data of their habits. You would have to embark on a proper tagging program, where you would tag it with a radio collar. They are still the same principles,

but what we are doing now would not be good. It is just a deer getting out of the way of some hunters and hounds. They do follow a little bit of a pattern, but it would not be any good, I do not think.

**Ms WARD** — It would not be enough to really give you accurate information as to where they are breeding or the like.

**Mr SHARMAN** — No. You would probably want to capture a deer, put a radio tracking collar on it and then send it out and let it go back to normal. Those are my thoughts anyhow.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you both for coming in today to provide us with some really good suggestions and ideas. Thank you very much.

**Witnesses withdrew.**