

# 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

### Witnesses

Mr Phillip Paton;

Mr Ben Teek;

Mr Colin Teek;

Mr Peter Panozzo;

Mr Peter Jacobs, and

Mr Peter O'Donnell, Upper Ovens Valley Landcare Group;

Mr Greg Mirabella, Victorian Farmers Federation, and

Mr Barry Mapley;

Mr Michael Weston;

Ms Paula Hall; and

Mr Paul Ivone.

**The CHAIR** — We are now moving into the public forum phase of the public hearing. The way this will work is that there will be a limit of 3 minutes for anybody who wants to come up and make a comment or express a view. I understand a few gentlemen have been here all day, so perhaps they might like to start off. State your name and give a little bit of background.

**Mr PATON** — Phillip Paton, farmer, from Mitta Valley.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome.

**Mr PATON** — Thank you. A lot of the things I had in mind have been said already, but I just want to strengthen it. We all know there will be no getting rid of the deer. There are always going to be animals there for the hunters to hunt, so that should keep them happy. But the big cost in my eyes is, one, to the environment and, two, to the farming community. The legislation, as it is now, does not allow anybody to make a profit from the harvesting of venison in the wild. If that were removed so there is a financial incentive for people to help control the problem, that would be wonderful.

Bob Gough this morning hit on the concept of a trap paddock, which you have also mentioned. Bob and I have talked about this. We have heard a lot about shooting the animals and carting the product out. Deer have legs, and in my mind it makes sense to ask whether we can get them to walk out to us, catch them in a paddock, kill them cleanly and send a good quality product off to be consumed somewhere for whatever purpose. Numbers — mob sizes — are ever increasing, in my experience of spotlighting. I have been told by Bob and other friends that someone has done some thermal imaging work. If you are out spotlighting and you see one, there are probably 10 to 15 there. On a quiet night when we have been out shooting, we have kept tally of what we have seen. So if we have seen over 20, the simple maths is that in a 4-kilometre area you have got over 200 deer, presumably.

When you are trying to feed hungry cattle in winter and you have got 200 extra head munching away on your paddocks, you have got to try to feed your animals as well as what I am classing as a pest. That is going to have a big impact on the farming community. If that is happening in our little patch, it is happening up the road and it is happening in the next valley. Where do you stop adding it all up? There are huge numbers.

Cattle have been excluded from the High Country. It does not affect me, because I was not one of those people, but deer are going to be a bigger issue for the environment up there. Cattle probably have some impact, but so do bushwalkers. That is a different subject. I should change — —

**Mr TILLEY** — No, dear to my heart.

**Mr McCURDY** — No, you are fine. Keep going. Put it on the transcript.

**Mr YOUNG** — You are actually on a four-out-of-five hit rate, so go for it.

**The CHAIR** — Although you do only have 3 minutes.

**Mr PATON** — Okay. You can remove the cattle easily. I would like to see the answer to that one. It has been suggested here today that if there are too many animals in the lower country, they move up into the High Country. If we can effectively harvest the animals from down lower, maybe we might lessen the impact up higher. It is just a theory I have.

**The CHAIR** — It is good to get all this, because we go through it once it is on the record. It gives us some good ideas and an understanding of people's views, which is really good.

**Mr PATON** — In my agricultural life a weed is classed as a plant out of place, so any introduced animal or plant could be classed as a weed out of place. Whether it is a fox, a rabbit or a deer, you name it, they do not belong in this environment. We need to be able to lessen that impact.

Finally, a thing I learnt many years ago when I was at college is that failing to prepare is preparing to fail. If we are not proactive in doing something positive, we are going to fail.

**Mr TILLEY** — Thanks, Phillip. Just indicatively, what has been the financial cost to your primary production business over the last couple years?

**Mr PATON** — I could not tell you the answer to that because — —

**The CHAIR** — You do not know how many are there.

**Mr TILLEY** — That is all right. We will keep asking.

**Mr PATON** — I do not know what is wandering into my paddock. All I can tell you is that there are highways coming down out of the bush and under the fence, so there is fence damage. You just go on what you can see. Very rarely do you see the animals in the daylight. The fact that there are very well-worn tracks tells me that there is a lot of traffic. I do not know.

**The CHAIR** — If you do at some stage do a bit of a calculation, please send us that information. It does not have to be spot on, but even if you just have a think about it.

**Mr PATON** — It would be a wild guess.

**Mr RAMSAY** — A guesstimate.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you.

**Mr TILLEY** — Thanks for sticking around.

**Mr McCURDY** — You have waited all day for that, and we appreciate it.

**Mr B. TEEK** — My name is Ben Teek. I am also from the Mitta Valley, just down the road from Phillip.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks for coming in.

**Mr B. TEEK** — It is a pleasure. It has been good to hear all the speakers. I think they have covered a lot of what I wanted to say. Phillip has also eloquently put across virtually all of our concerns. If I could just add that from experience I know that in neighbouring states you can harvest wild game species and utilise their carcasses for human consumption. I would like to push for that, personally. I think that could be a solution to our issue. Putting a dollar value on them would be an incentive for us to reduce their numbers and their associated impact on our livelihood, which is — —

**The CHAIR** — Are you a cattle farmer too?

**Mr B. TEEK** — Yes. Phillip did mention it, but in our back paddocks we traditionally calve cattle during winter. This season particularly we have noticed that it is a real issue. The feed was not there, and we have had to buy in hay to the tune of approximately \$5000 to cover that shortfall. The impacts are becoming really noticeable. Like the fellow from Harrierville described, in the last three or so years it has become exponentially pronounced. You have to wonder what is next. There is also the fact that deer are cloven-hoofed animals, not that dissimilar to cattle. There is the potential there for biosecurity issues. Who knows — if something like foot-and-mouth disease came in, it would be nigh on impossible to control with that wild population mixing with domestic cattle. There are concerns on that level too. It is a real issue.

**The CHAIR** — Have you had any issues with hunters?

**Mr B. TEEK** — I have. Personally I have had issues with people camping at the back of our property and leaving beer cans. We do not drive in the paddocks in winter with four-wheel drives because it is too wet, but they will get stuck and then come through, creating a mess. There are also rogue hound hunters. We have wild dog issues, so we do not have dogs to work cattle, and the hounds that they use can sometimes run through the paddocks and cause mayhem with the cattle. That has been a bit of an issue too.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you.

**Mr B. TEEK** — That pretty much covers it all.

**Mr McCURDY** — Thanks, Ben.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks very much again. It is really valuable to have your comments on the record. I think this is the first time we have ever done this, so we are a bit new to it.

**Mr C. TEEK** — I am actually Ben's father, so I am just going to give a quick 1-minute historical perspective.

**The CHAIR** — Sure.

**Mr C. TEEK** — I bought that farm in 1989. It is about Ben's age, I suppose. I worked pretty hard to get rid of the rabbits and the blackberries at the back of the place, especially into the Crown land, which was just solid blackberries and rabbits. It was a problem back then, and we worked hard to get that grazing land back again. But in the last three years I have seen deer exponentially explode to the point where it is actually costing us a lot of money. Ben has got his hands on the figures for the extra feed that we have had to buy in to make up the shortfall that the deer have consumed. It has become a major issue over the last few years. All I wanted to add was a sort of historical perspective and that I now see the deer becoming exactly what rabbits were. How long have I been there? Almost 30 years. That is what is happening, and it has happened pretty fast. Anyway, thank you very much for going to this effort.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Can I just ask you a quick question? Ben alluded to the wild dogs. Have you had any economic damage in relation to the wild dogs?

**Mr C. TEEK** — I did years ago have calves being attacked — newly born calves — especially with heifers calving down in the back paddocks that Ben described. We lost a few calves. A lot of it was that the mothers would abandon them when the dogs came in. So that was an issue then, but I would not say that it has been a serious issue lately. When I have calved cattle in those back paddocks it has not been.

**Mr B. TEEK** — Potentially because our neighbour has sheep.

**Mr RAMSAY** — They are the feed source. A fair call.

**The CHAIR** — Easier.

**Mr C. TEEK** — I think that is the issue. They are much easier.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks very much.

**Mr C. TEEK** — Thanks very much.

**Mr TILLEY** — I was going to say, you are not going to go into sheep, are you?

**The CHAIR** — Welcome.

**Mr PANOZZO** — My name is Peter Panozzo. I come from Mount Beauty. I will give you some answers to some of the questions you probably want to ask. One is that if you want any control measures for deer, just go on any American website and it will tell you what you can put into plants and trees when you grow them and when you plant them and the deer will not eat them. You can get all types of different deterrents. This is one thing I tell people at home, people who have got their gardens, their camellias and the whole works: my brother lives on Simmonds Creek Road; the deer on one side of the road come in, so you put diesel on a rag, hang it from a tree and they will not come. As far as deer are concerned in the wintertime, they all come down into the valleys where it is sheltered. They do not stay up top, because just like humans they like comfort. When it is snowy and blowy and all of that they come down. Not only that, the feed up top goes rank. When they get down to the bottom, and if they come into an area first — it

might be the first year they are there — they get to finding things, just like humans do. When you move to a new town, you go and find things. The deer do the same.

At home in Simmonds Creek Road and on the estate up behind Mount Beauty, they are eating agapanthus right down. They never did. But a couple of deer found that the agapanthus was all right. And then they have moved on, and they find more agapanthus, and people are going, ‘They’re eating my agapanthus’. So that is one thing. The deer where my brother is — we have actually got a stick here. I will give it to you, Bill. There is a pine tree 30 metres from his bedroom. The deer have been rubbing that for 25 years now. When my brother built his house 30 years ago we had tracks coming down. We hunt all around that area. Last Saturday morning my mate and I went across the road probably 80 metres from my brother’s house. I put up a deer inside there. It ran back towards the houses. We did not get it. We went up further. I have tracks which I have cut, which I can walk along quietly, and I can get on the deer. We put up another one. In around my brother’s place over the last 20 years we have probably shot 35–40 deer. They are a creature of habit. I have got a lot of people who have got farms and that, and I will go and cull for them. You find all of the deer tracks in wintertime. It is wet. It is no different from cows or sheep. When they walk, they make their tracks all over the place.

We go hunting at Swifts Creek to shoot deer on a property over there. My mate there has a cabin, and he gets hunters coming in. He lets them go, and charges a bit of money for them. He is making money out of it. I think it was the Liberal government a few years ago that made it easier for farmers to do that sort of stuff. So I do not know why farmers are not taking it on, because there is a big market there. In Harrierville there is nothing to stop you shooting the deer if you are bordering the state forest. If you have got a problem, get someone to come in. You said you have got a whole heap of hunters in the area like we do. Go there at night-time. When a deer comes in, nail it. Take it home, put it in the fridge or give it to people. Give it to people for dog food. I mean, there are a lot of people just crying out for dog food.

The other thing too is: why is all this on deer when we have got so many kangaroos? Around Mount Beauty we must have 1000 kangaroos between the golf course right around through to Tawonga South and Tawonga. ‘It’s native. We can’t shoot it’. You have to have a permit. Cockies go, ‘Oh, I’ve got all these deer coming on my property’. You have got mates. You get the form on the internet — you can download that, you can go out and you can shoot them. What you do with them I do not know. You can take them home, whatever. Give them to the dogs. Give them to your mate’s dogs.

But the fact that deer are not native and do not fit in the countryside — that’s bullshit, because there are the blackberries, the square weed; there. There is that much stuff. There is new stuff coming up all the time. The wasp — European wasps. Last year we shot one deer near my brother’s place up the side of the hill. Not one blowy came to that carcass. We had it there for 6 hours. Not one blowy. The Euro wasps came. When I am walking in the bush — not so much now, but from Christmas onwards — you just go along, and all of a sudden you can hear them. You look in the light and you can see all the Euros. What are they doing to the insect life, our native insect life? That is what I want to say.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. Anybody else?

**Mr JACOBS** — G’day. We are from the Upper Ovens Valley Landcare Group. I am Peter Jacobs.

**Mr O’DONNELL** — And I am Peter O’Donnell.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome. Thanks for coming.

**Mr JACOBS** — Thanks for having us. Landcare is obviously interested in conserving and restoring the environment, both private and public land, and we are really pleased to contribute to a discussion around invasive animals. We are going to talk a little bit broadly about how we can support this forum, but also the community in general, in regard to invasive species or animals on Crown land. Peter is going to talk a bit more about deer, because we have heard a lot about deer. Obviously invasive animals in this area have been established for a long time since settlement. As somebody said earlier, the lack of natural predators is a real problem. I suppose as far as Crown land goes, deer, foxes, cats, dogs, horses, rabbits and goats are all concerns for having a healthy environment on Crown land. Obviously it is unrealistic to eliminate all

invasive species from Crown land. I guess the land also is learning to adapt a little bit to the impact of species, so I guess the important thing that we wanted to get across is that elimination of invasive species is obviously not realistic. There is never going to be enough money to do that. The methods in fact, as we have heard today, are not necessarily all there to be able to deal with eliminating all of our invasive species. There are some social and cultural issues as well that are associated with the control of those species.

I guess the important thing we would like to get across is being strategic in the landscape in how we actually go about dealing with these issues into the future. The important thing that we would like to put across is the focus on looking at places where the risk is greatest to the values. Rather than just saying, 'Deer are a problem everywhere' or, 'This animal is a problem everywhere', where really are the values that are at risk and where do we need to focus the efforts while things are happening much more in the long term in terms of the whole landscape? It is obviously really important to have a strategy on how to deal with this. We have heard a little bit about asset protection, containment and control, and eliminating species. In terms of the species that are around here, I would just like to talk a little bit about how we might deal with some of them. I will leave Peter to talk more about deer. I think asset protection certainly is an important approach to how we are managing deer at the moment in this environment. We heard a little bit before about the trial for alpine peatlands and also the issues around private property in places like Harrietville. I think we really do need to look carefully at the impacts on those critical values, whether it is peatlands and bogs in the alpine country or neighbouring properties in the valleys, to really come up with ways to deal with the impacts on those particular values, and then start to deal more across the landscape.

Dogs are a really interesting one as well. Obviously the issues with private property and the agricultural impacts of wild dogs are really important. Dogs are also an important predator in the landscape. One of the problems we have had over decades is the lack of natural predators in the landscape. What is important to think about with dog control is what their actual role is once you get away from their impact on private property. They indeed may well have an impact — and research is starting to show the impact they are having — on things like horses, deer and other invasive species.

Cats and foxes, again, are important, I guess, in terms of asset protection. They are right across the landscape. It is unrealistic to think that there is going to be a solution to eliminate cats and foxes, but their impact on threatened species and vulnerable species is really important.

One thing I certainly have not heard talked about — yes, perhaps in other forums — is wild horses. Wild horses, or feral horses, are a particular issue on Crown land. There are some on the Bogong High Plains and certainly east of here. I suppose the need to contain the populations of feral horses is really important, and then starting to move towards control.

Someone mentioned New Zealand before in terms of trying to control the deer populations. It is really important to contain this feral horse population and then start to deal with its control. Obviously there are some, I suppose, very important social and cultural issues associated with that, but the impact of horses is probably greater — in fact it is greater — than deer in alpine peatlands and that sensitive alpine country.

With animals like goats and pigs, I think that is where we work towards the elimination part of the spectrum and those sorts of things. As soon as they appear, they really should be eliminated and can be eliminated.

I guess the key point that we would like to get across is that obviously strategies at these landscape scales are really important. It is about the impacts, not necessarily the numbers. Population numbers are good to know, but what is more important is what impact they are actually having.

To do this, we also need to challenge some cultural and social issues in the community, whether it is issues around game or pests, whether it is the issue of being able to shoot wild horses — because that is probably the only way to effectively be able to control or eliminate horses — and having strategies that are adaptive, that are supported with good research and that give us some good long-term approaches to this.

I guess the closing message is that it is a complex area — not all invasive species are the same; they need to be dealt with in different ways — and it is really important to have a strategy that looks at questions like: are we trying to protect assets? Are we trying to eliminate the species? Are we going to try to control it or are we trying to eliminate it? Having an integrated strategy across the landscape, we think, is the way to go, and it gives the community much more confidence, I suppose, as to how we move forward. That is all from me. Peter, do you want to go on?

**Mr O'DONNELL** — Yes. As well as being involved in a Landcare group, and I have been on the committee there for the last 10 years or more, I am also a landowner and part-time farmer. I have had a lot of problems, mainly in recent years. As everyone says, the growth of the deer population has been exponential over the last three to five years. I have trouble with fences and crops — it is almost a waste of time trying to grow a winter crop. On the few acres that I do, at times deer will decimate a crop and they will tear your fences apart, pushing their way through them, and when they get a fright they charge and break wires.

On planting trees, I have replanted along the creek at my place; some of those trees are now probably 15 years old, and they are still being killed off by deer. You know, they like particular species: they like the white gums and they like the mint bush. It seems that whenever you replant them, they manage to come and destroy most of them. It is not just in the first couple of years. In some of our Landcare group planting we are seeing now they are being browsed; they are being nipped off. Those trees lose their vigour and die. But I also see trees that I have had there for 15 years that are being rubbed, and it is still having an effect on them. Those trees are stunted.

Environmentally, around my property I am surrounded by pine plantations with a bit of native forest heading up onto the hills and along the creek. The deer tracks in recent years are just amazing. I have never seen it like this. I have been on that property for about 30 years and I have never seen so many tracks in the bush there. Where it is scrubby and there is a lot of understorey, the deer have just got myriad tracks through it of broken ground. I imagine this creates a lot more run-off silt running down into the rivers, and given that they are widespread through all these mountain valleys, that is happening over a large area.

I hear a bit about pest status. I think pest status is a good thing, but I hear concerns that landowners will then be responsible for eliminating deer. I think the largest landowner that has got a deer problem is the state. Most of the problem is in areas like these that are surrounded by bush. I do not know how much you have heard from people who live out in the flat country about having a deer problem. I think the biggest problem we have got is for the landowner that controls most of the land around here.

**Mr TILLEY** — Once they come onto your land they might be your problem if it changes.

**Mr O'DONNELL** — Yes, but they do not stay there long. They come down every night, and they go back into the bush again.

**Mr TILLEY** — Yes, but it will cost you: if they walk on your land, it might cost you personally.

**Mr O'DONNELL** — Yes, maybe. When they are coming down onto your property, they are costing you anyway. I think we need to put the same effort into deer that we have put into rabbits over the years. I mean, the older people that I knew around here said that back in the 1920s the creek banks here used to just move as you walked along them because there were that many rabbits there. But a fairly broad-based attack on rabbits — obviously it was mostly myxomatosis, but others like calicivirus and so on — and a lot of work in poisoning and ripping up of burrows and all the usual things has done a remarkable job over the last 100 years in this area. I think it is going to need the same sort of thing with deer.

It is good to target specific areas where they are a problem, but deer are a very mobile animal, far more so than rabbits I would say. I mean, they range over a lot of country. Shooting I do not think is very significant. I see shooters every weekend basically up in the top end of the valley here where I have livestock. While they shoot quite a few, I think that if anything, they push them down towards the more populated areas where the deer are hiding in the back where they feel it is a bit safer. But I am sure there

are plenty of deer there, no matter how many are shot. So I think it is going to need a fairly remarkable effort to remove them.

I believe poisoning is not looked at in Victoria and it is not legal, but there has been some research done into it in New South Wales, and I think they should be looking at that in Victoria. We need to find a way to bait these critters and try and knock out large numbers of them.

So the pest status I think needs looking at, and obviously the carcass utilisation will be something that might assist people to make some money from removing them. Foxes, too, are a problem in the area, I think. We hear a lot about dogs, and dogs are a popular political issue so there is money put into the removal of dogs and you can get government help, but there is very little with foxes. The local dog man does a remarkable job in chasing wild dogs around here and removing them, but they will not give you any assistance to remove foxes, which can be a pest to farmers and of course anyone who has got chooks.

That is about it, I guess. I think we need to look at the deer problem more in the same light that we have looked at rabbits over the years and attack them in a broad-based and serious manner, not just change a few regulations for shooting them.

**Mr TILLEY** — I just want to challenge you on one thing, because this inquiry is not only about deer but also dogs. I just want to go back to where you said that wild dogs are a natural predator and we need them.

**Mr JACOBS** — Yes.

**Mr TILLEY** — I am just trying to work out in my mind where the alpine dingo was the predator species and the wild dog has bred the dingo out of the region.

**Mr JACOBS** — Yes.

**Mr TILLEY** — Whereas we are now experiencing wild dogs; and if you are a sheep grazier, that is where your problem is predominantly. I am just trying to understand why you said we need wild dogs.

**Mr JACOBS** — I suppose for the sake of time I did not go into too much detail there. I guess you have got important areas close to agricultural land where dogs are a real problem, and they certainly must be controlled, there is no question about that. But once you get away from there into the more remote country, where there was once a healthy population of dingoes, that is now largely being replaced with dogs. I guess you could argue about dogs or dingoes, but it probably does not matter a lot. In fact genetically it is very hard to tell the difference.

**Mr TILLEY** — I think they are starkly different. They thrill kill.

**Mr JACOBS** — Yes, but the role in the natural landscape — just forgetting the agricultural, I am not arguing about the agricultural impact — that dingoes once had is now largely being taken by dogs. I guess there is an argument for saying that having that natural predator back in the landscape in remote areas helps to control things like horses, deer and other invasive species. We do not need to be doing control where it is having no real impact on agricultural land, where in fact it is having some potentially positive impacts on being a natural predator back again in that natural environment.

**Mr TILLEY** — I think we will beg to differ for a while on that, Peter. Sorry. Not on the wild dogs, mate.

**Mr JACOBS** — What is your concern about a dog in a remote area?

**Mr TILLEY** — That they will eat native fauna. We have got studies and proof there that they have eradicated significant amounts of native fauna.

**Mr JACOBS** — The research, as I understand it, is also indicating they can have a strong impact potentially on invasive species, and it may well help to restore some balance there. In fact the native fauna

is used to adapting to dingoes. The fact that dingoes ate native fauna is not, in a biological ecosystem approach, a big problem. They learnt to adapt to that and it is part of the population control. I guess I am just putting an argument there that if you take a predator out of the landscape, you tend to get an imbalance there. In fact dogs, dingoes — whatever it is — are potentially assisting to control the invasive species in those remote areas.

**Mr TILLEY** — Have you got any studies on that? If you can provide the committee with any studies that prove they are assisting, it would be really appreciated.

**Mr JACOBS** — I would be happy to do that. I can certainly provide some information on that if you like.

**Mr McCURDY** — Thanks, gentlemen.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much. Is there anybody else that wants to say something? Welcome.

**Mr MIRABELLA** — Good afternoon. I will be very brief. Greg Mirabella. I am the president of the Wangaratta branch of the Victorian Farmers Federation. I am here on very short notice and I wish to just pass on a couple of points is all, and then I will throw to Barry.

I farm just outside of Wangaratta, on the flatland there. We have around my area very few problems with rabbits, foxes, kangaroos or anything else, but to my surprise a couple of weeks ago I sat at my front window and watched a sambar deer walking up and down my road, which tells me — —

**The CHAIR** — What sort of farming do you do?

**Mr MIRABELLA** — Beef. And I am sure you have heard enough about the extent of the deer problem. In discussion with some of our membership in very recent times — and again I am not familiar with the submissions that have been put to this committee but just to pass on a bit of anecdotal thought, and I tend to support these views so I will present them — from what we can see, the explosion in deer is coincident with a number of factors, not least of which of course is the removal of cattle from the High Country but also the effects of the alpine bushfires of 2003, 2006 and 2009. I do not know if that has all been well covered.

**Mr McCURDY** — Happy to hear it again.

**Mr MIRABELLA** — But it begs the question — and this is the point and probably the main reason I have got up here — that if we have this problem that is essentially an eradicable problem, and particularly if you want to examine the question of encouraging the utilisation of slaughtered deer, why are we not allowing domestic cattle to compete back in the same areas that the deer are currently in? I leave that question with you.

The only other question, just a separate one, is: from our point of view — and it is one right out of the blue — the Rural City of Wangaratta was recently removed from the kangaroo pet meat trial; the answer we would like to know is why?

**Mr YOUNG** — So would I.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Can I just respond to that?

**The CHAIR** — That is outside the terms of reference, but I am sure we can get you some information. You could give us a call and ask us about that.

**Mr RAMSAY** — We asked that question and the advice as I understand it was that any renderer that wanted to participate in the trial could. I will check *Hansard* on that, but that was a question we raised with the government, and their response — through the Minister for Agriculture — was that those that wanted to participate could.

**Mr MAPLEY** — Barry Mapley. I come from Eurobin. We have got a fairly big property down there, national parks on two sides. Between the three properties on my side of the river there have been over 200 deer shot this year. We have got deer coming out of our ears down there. You put on 15 tonnes of super or lime and we are going backwards. Greg was there one night and he just said to me he had counted nearly 50 deer on the property. So you are feeding deer.

If they are going to be shot in the bush, a lot of the hunters are shooting them — because they have got that much meat they take maybe the backstraps or the back legs of a young one, leave the rest there. We shot a dog the other day with eight pups. Now that must be good feed to be able to rear eight pups — a wild dog.

We cannot do much about the deer. There are two things. If they were harvested, if there was a pet food — we have got an abattoir only 3 kilometres away from us. They wanted to take the kangaroos from down at Puckapunyal when they were shot down there a few years ago to process them; they were not allowed to. The deer, if there was a commercial value on them, the fellows would not leave them in the bush. We would not have the dogs living in luxury with all the meat they like.

I am a bit deaf. I did not hear a lot of what was said before. My big worry is we can probably keep the deer down a little bit, but if we get foot-and-mouth or some of the other diseases into this country, we cannot beat them. You will not catch them, because you have got deer running with our cattle; they had enough trouble trying to clean it up in England with little blocks. When you have got 20 000, 30 000 or 50 000 deer in these mountains and we get a disease into this country, we can just pack up and forget it. I do not know whether that has been brought up tonight, but that is my worry.

**The CHAIR** — It has, but the more we hear the better with these issues.

**Mr McCURDY** — Barry, on that kangaroo pet meat trial, the coalition introduced that two and a half years ago to run for two years, and we are still waiting for the current government to give that an extension before we can even look at another possibility, but it has been mooted in other places.

**Mr MAPLEY** — That same abattoir that I am talking about, they were the ones that applied to process those kangaroos and they are only 3 kilometres from where — they are at Eurobin anyway. As I was saying, if there was a commercial value on those deer, they would not be left in the bush. We have got a dog problem. They are in our country but a few years ago — before the deer exploded — we were losing calves. We had to go out of sheep, but we have not lost any calves because there is plenty of food in the bush.

**Mr McCURDY** — That's it.

**Mr MAPLEY** — But how many dogs will be there when you get a bitch that can rear eight pups? They must be in good nick. But I think the deer thing, without a biological solution, they are gone. I have got another property in Mudgegonga, which is fairly open country. The people out there are shooting deer now. Where they are coming from I do not know, but the threat of a disease coming into this country is the one that really worries me now. That is all I have got to say. Thank you.

**Mr MIRABELLA** — Can I just throw back to a point I made earlier. If we are talking about this issue of harvesting the resource or utilising the resource, I still go back to this issue of cattle. I know it is a politically fraught issue — and putting aside the discussions about the politics of it or the science of the damage to alpine peat and all that kind of stuff — but the fact is that domestic stock can be controlled. They can be placed, they can be herded, mustered and processed for economic value and deer cannot.

**Mr TILLEY** — Tell us, Greg, has the VFF got any photographs of any cattle wallowing in moss beds or any of those areas by chance?

**Mr MIRABELLA** — I sense a loaded question. I do not know, Bill.

**The CHAIR** — This sounds like a parliamentary speech.

**Mr TILLEY** — Parks certainly do have photos. They did not have any photos of cattle wallowing, so I was just wondering.

**Mr MIRABELLA** — I am not aware. I am actually not familiar with many cattle varieties that wallow.

**Mr TILLEY** — No, neither am I.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Greg, four out of five of us up here agree with you.

**Mr MAPLEY** — No, cattle do not wallow.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks very much.

**Mr WESTON** — My name is Michael Weston. I come from Eurobin. I am sorry I could not get up here earlier today. It was too early, and I was too busy. We grow nuts and we run sheep. I do not know whether the bird issue has been raised with you today, but it is going to be now. It has always been a problem, but with the deer and the wombats, it is just becoming overwhelming. On the bird subject, sulphur-crested cockatoos have always been a problem with nuts. They are covered by a gazettal notice that renders them unprotected wildlife when they are doing commercial damage. I have been at Eurobin for 60 years, from memory. In those 60 years I have rarely ever seen a black cockatoo. There has been a mass invasion of black cockatoos in the last 6 to 12 months. There has been a mass invasion of another species called gang-gang cockatoos. In one block of 20 trees this year we did not harvest a nut. Admittedly last season was a difficult walnut season, but we would have had a clear loss of about \$5000 caused by those on that 20-tree block. I will not say what I had to do to save the rest of the crop — I cannot say. Those black cockatoos and gang-gangs at the present moment are a protected species. The quickest way you can help me is to go back to Melbourne and put them on the same basis as the sulphur-crested cockatoos. I have raised this with Leigh Murray in Wangaratta and he said, ‘Gang-gangs are a high-value species’.

I have done a written submission for you, which I am tossing up whether I will give to you or not. I think the Wildlife Act should just be repealed full stop. It should be just open slather on everything. There should be an endangered species act proclaimed with the criteria that it be down to 100 of that species in a particular area, and the first species you should put on it is *Homo sapiens* — Ovens Valley farmer — because we are down to 100, and we are going to go under.

I will change the subject now. That is the bird issue. We were fortunate enough after a wait of nearly 20 years to get a subsidy for a wild dog exclusion net, because we ran sheep. I was lucky because it was the last lot of money. To try and be brief, the government gave us about \$15 000 towards the clearing and the materials. We have had to put in nearly another — I have never added it up, but it would have to be \$35 000–\$40 000. That fence is almost 3 kilometres long. I hope it has been effective. It must have been effective against wild dogs because — touch wood — we have not had a wild dog kill a sheep in the last 15–18 years. The last sheep that were mauled were mauled by a neighbour’s labrador — amusing in itself.

They gave us two options. One was a seven-wire electric fence with four hot wires. I did not go for that. I went for a 1.8-metre, 2-metre-high cyclone fence — two lots of mesh on top of one another. I had done some of the fence myself before the subsidy came along, so we just added the top part. It had hot wire put along the bottom of it. I and hunters that have come onto the property have shot 25 in the last 12–18 months. I do not think shooting them is an answer, because in either shooting or poisoning them you end up with one thing: carcasses that have got to be disposed of. I think there has to be some way of trapping them. I think the answer is that the government has to spend a huge amount of money building 2-metre fences — something like 200 kilometres in the Ovens Valley. The government needs to put some of the onus on VicRoads or get some money from VicRoads, because it is only a question of time before an accident happens like what happened over at Barnawartha, and it will be a deer instead of a cow.

Hotspots need to be looked at. Down at Rostrevor, the hop farm, where the road is right beside the hill: a fence. In my time as a grain grower there used to be a thing — you will know, Tim — mesh silos. You would have seen them — 8-foot high, very heavy mesh, a circular thing. When I have been spotlighting

deer, deer will not attempt to jump that 2-metre fence. They always nose along near the bottom of it looking for a hole to get through. The issue that then arises is that you cannot leave them there for a week. You have got to have some way of patrolling them every day. I do not know how your vehicles and things for the firefighting season work, but I dare say they sit somewhere unused for six months of the year, plus the crew or whatever they are called. If you are going to do something about the deer and catch them live, you need to have some way of transporting them. As the gentleman there said before: let them walk to the abattoir or whatever it is. You have got to catch them but — —

**The CHAIR** — I think we have got one other person after you, so an extra minute or two.

**Mr WESTON** — That I can have or not?

**The CHAIR** — Yes, you can, just to finish off.

**Mr WESTON** — Those are my thoughts. These mesh bins have gone out of production now. You would have to go to the well mesh company and ask them to make 100 or 500 or something like that, because they have got very difficult to buy at a clearing sale in the Riverina now, because all of the Riverina boys want them for pig traps. Evidently they are a most effective wild pig trap, when put in a spot. Those are my thoughts on the deer side of it. I do not think you are ever going to shoot them out. You have got to trap them and somehow use the value that is there to pay for the cost of doing it.

The other animal that is giving me a lot of trouble at the moment is wombats. I went to school in Myrtleford and travelled down to Myrtleford every school day for my primary school anyway. When we were kids we would have tipped the school bus over if we had seen a dead wombat on the side of the road, because we would all have been over one side of the bus peering at it. There is not a week that goes past now when you drive into Myrtleford that there is not a dead wombat somewhere along the road. My cousin described his paddock this morning as like a battlefield in Iraq; it's full of craters — wombat holes. Mr Mapley has dealt with some of my wombats, and another man with a 20-tonne excavator has dealt with them. On the subject of the excavator, because of the 25–30 that we have shot on the property, the carcasses have become a problem and we have had to dig a pit. The two pet wedge-tailed eagles up on the hill cannot eat 25 of them, but they have done a good job. That has covered most of what I have wanted to say briefly. For a lot of it I have put pen to paper, and I might send it down to you, Tim.

**The CHAIR** — If you can, that would be great.

**Mr McCURDY** — Good on you. That would be great. Thanks, Michael.

**The CHAIR** — We would definitely appreciate that.

**Mr WESTON** — Those are just my thoughts and my experience. Thank you very much for your time.

**Ms HALL** — Thank you. I am sorry I was not here earlier to hear what you might have said and how you have been — —

**Mr McCURDY** — That is okay.

**The CHAIR** — We do not mind. It is good to know. If there is ever an issue that is repeated, we know it is an issue.

**Ms HALL** — My name is Paula Hall, and I am part owner with my husband of a very small property where we have chestnuts and we grow garlic and blueberries. It is just very small, but it is getting more frustrating because of the deer problem. I just wanted to add — —

**Mr McCURDY** — In Bright?

**Ms HALL** — We are in Porepunkah. I just wanted to add that we do back up to the national forest. It is really quite beautiful. I have noticed that the problem seems to have been more since the floods that we had back in 1993. I think there was a deer farm out in Whorouly, and of course it got flooded and a lot of the

deer then were out in the wild. From that time on it has been my experience — I have been here for 25 years — to see that the deer population has increased. I think a lot of that had to do with that event and forward. I do not know what anybody else thinks about that.

I do know that we live in this area where we have fire and flood, and I think that that is going to continue to keep happening. If we do have places where we raise the deer or we raise anything like this, we have to think about what it would be like through a natural disaster — what will happen and where they will go, and how we cannot round them up or can round them up — whatever. It is just another thought that I just wanted to pass on.

**Mr McCURDY** — I am not even sure — are sambar farmed? Is it sambar that they farm? Okay, so sambar have not been farmed, so at Whorouly it would not have been sambar deer. That would not have created the explosion of the sambar deer anyway.

**Ms HALL** — Okay. I had thought that the Cardamones — —

**Mr McCURDY** — Red deer, or?

**Ms HALL** — Did he have red? Yes. We have a problem with deer at the spring that feeds our property water. We have had to tend to that much more. We see where they have been in the spring. I think that that is a little problem for me, I am not sure. Anything that has to do with water we are all pretty particular about, so that is another thought. And of course they are rubbing and hurting the chestnut trees.

Michael did bring up a very good issue — we have had a problem with birds, and the Alpine Shire Council has set and gone beyond what used to be just protocol. Now they actually have a scare gun program. In the past we have found that it does not work really well. We did not get any hazelnuts at all this last year because of the birds — the same birds that are getting Michael's have gotten ours.

We really love our lifestyle here. We will work, and we always understand, and we do not mind sharing with some of the animals, but it is getting a little bit bad, so I would really appreciate it if, with all of this, you can listen and hear us and talk with people who know what they are doing — much different than me — and try to come up with a plan, and not just a plan for here but a long-term plan. I appreciate you doing that. Thank you.

**Mr McCURDY** — Thanks, Paula.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks very much.

**Mr IVONE** — Just a couple of things that were not really touched on with deer. The spread of weeds — Himalayan honeysuckle is being spread by them. That is just one. Inkweed is another one. There are probably a lot more than that. Broom is being spread by them.

On the other side of the issue they were talking about if foot-and-mouth comes in: well, they are already a problem as far as spreading disease goes, because in the Ovens Valley there have been three cases I know of where — I cannot remember the name of the disease — but a tick carried by a deer affects cattle. Good, healthy cattle can, if you put any stress on them at all, just die. Someone might know the name of it. Anybody know the name of it? No.

**The CHAIR** — It would be interesting. Even if you could let us know and we can follow it up — —

**Mr IVONE** — Yes. I can think of two in Merriang and one case in Rosewhite where cattle got the disease. One farm lost eight cows. Good, healthy cows — as soon as you try to do anything with them, they just fall over and die. It stresses them. It affects their system.

**The CHAIR** — We will try to find out but, as I said, if you can give us a bit more — —

**Mr IVONE** — And the other one is Johne's disease. They carry both strains of Johne's disease, which is a big problem in cattle.

**Mr McCURDY** — Do they?

**Mr IVONE** — Yes.

**Mr McCURDY** — I did not know they carry Johne's disease.

**Mr IVONE** — Just a couple of things that no-one touched on, that is all.

**The CHAIR** — No, it is really appreciated, and it is good — —

**Mr IVONE** — And like Barry said, with wild dogs, the number of deer getting shot now, they just carry a bit out. There needs to be something done about disposing of the rest of the carcass, hopefully. Thanks very much.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you.

**Mr McCURDY** — Just as we close the hearing, can I thank everyone for coming this afternoon, because as the local member, I hear so many people coming and talking to me and phoning me about different issues, and then we put on an inquiry like this and nobody turns up. So can I just say thanks to everybody who has come today to make a contribution. It has been really beneficial.

**Mr PANOZZO** — Seeing as everyone has finished now, can we just all bear in mind that back in the 1970s the LCC, the Land Conservation Council, did a study on the whole alpine area to make the national park. The ADA was fighting to have hunting allowed in parks — for the status quo. National parks — —

**The CHAIR** — Sorry. We will just finish the public hearing. You were not intending what you were saying to go on the public record, were you?

**Mr PANOZZO** — Well, it is important.

**The CHAIR** — You have got to come to the microphone. This will be the last.

**Mr PANOZZO** — Peter Panozzo from Mount Beauty again. Back in 1970 or the early 1970s, the LCC, the Land Conservation Council, did a study on all state forests and everything with the intention of proclaiming national parks. The ADA was fighting very hard to have the status quo with hunting back then. The national parks association fought very hard and had a big campaign to try and get the government to go with no hunting. I actually ran a campaign of 600-and-something signatures, which I got from all over the valley here, for a multi-use national park. Anyway in the end hunting was allowed in the Wonnangatta and in Avon Wilderness Park, and I think that was about it.

That was a seasonal thing from 15 February to 15 December. A couple of years ago there was the 'We plan', which was asking for public input into a new management plan for the Alpine National Park. I put a submission in there asking if we could at least have a system like in New Zealand where hunters can go to the parks and say, 'Listen, I want to hunt'. You get that block. You are the ones in that block. You hunt that block. It would be beneficial for parks because then the hunters could say, 'Look, there's broom in there or there's something else'. The hunters could be 'the friends of Bogong' or something like that. There is so much potential, but we have always got the Greens saying, 'No hunting', and they all reckon it is highly dangerous — but it has been going for 30 years in Wonnangatta and the Avon, and it has been going on in state forests.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. People have made contributions about that, so we have got some information.

**Mr PANOZZO** — Okay.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much. We will now finish the public forum part of this hearing. Thanks to everybody that has attended. We do respect and take on board everybody's view in the

deliberations. The more people that say things, the more we have to listen to that. Thanks again for coming and having your say.

**Committee adjourned.**