

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land

Dunkeld — 29 November 2016

Members

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Executive officer: Dr Christopher Gribbin

Witness

Mr Anthony Evans, secretary, Warrnambool Field and Game.

The ACTING CHAIR (Mr Young) — Considering we are all here, we will kick off. Welcome, Anthony. We are all very pleased to have you here giving evidence at this inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land. I will get a couple of formalities out of the way. All evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege; therefore you are protected for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

Today's evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof transcript within a week or so, and any corrections you need to make can be corrected in that. The evidence given will be posted to the public.

I would just like to acknowledge Emma Kealy in the audience, the local member for Lowan. I am sure today is going to be a great bit of information for her to take back. You will have a little bit of time to give us a presentation on whatever you want to say, and then we will hit you up with some questions.

Mr EVANS — That is fine. As I said, Richard has covered nearly all of it. My name is Anthony Evans. I am currently the secretary of Warrnambool Field and Game. We are affiliated with Field & Game Australia. We have 246 members. We shoot monthly, and we conduct shoots, like the Griffiths Island shoot, for the council and/or private landowners. We do have people contact us from time to time to say, 'Have you got anyone that is willing to come spotlighting or shooting for foxes during lambing season?', and all that sort of thing.

Visual presentation.

Mr EVANS — I have put a few little slides together just to give you an idea of what a mutton-bird looks like. Richard has been through the whole cycle of how they leave Australia and fly back up to near Alaska there and then come back around — a 15 000-kilometre round trip, usually with the prevailing winds. They primarily come back to the southern coast of Australia to breed. As he said, there is a week in September, but usually you can bank on 22 September every year. Every year they will fly in. They come back and land in the same burrow that they left the year before. I do not know how they find it when you see how many of them are there. They are usually pretty weak and tired then, and it is a pretty good time for the foxes to get them.

For those of you who are not really familiar with Port Fairy, Griffiths Island is on the top there. You can see the small causeway. We used to work with the department — we did work with the department and still do — about 40 years ago. We first started doing the shoots there on Griffiths Island. We would apply through the department for a populous place permit so we could undertake shooting on the island. About 15 years ago we actually met with Senior Sergeant Dennis Tocock — I think he was the licensing man for all our gun clubs and licensing in Melbourne — and Mick Gloury, our local DFO. We had a look at it and decided that it is an island and it is not populated so we do not need to get a populous place permit to shoot on it.

So that is where we came to advertising. The shire would advertise. We shoot on about the second or third Saturday in September — depending on school holidays, so we do not block the island off. We advertise, or the shire advertises, two weekends and a midweek before our shoot. Myself and usually someone from the department will be there at about 5.30 a.m. or 6.00 a.m. We have got a big board with a sign on it saying that the island is blocked from 6 until 11, and we tape it all off and turn people away. If someone comes in and they are going for a run, they are usually going to be 20 minutes, so we let them go. We do not usually start until 8 o'clock in the morning.

As part of our populace permit years ago, we effectively do a JSA. We follow a bit of a procedure that we have been doing, which is: before anyone goes to shoot, two people go across the causeway — one goes left, one goes right, they meet in the middle and make sure no-one is out there — then we will let the members out to shoot.

The little dots there on the left-hand side is usually where we position our shooters. We send a lot of people and we get a lot of their kids where all the arrows are to drive this in the direction towards the shooters. It looks fairly flat there, but there is actually a hill. That last arrow on the right here is a hill, so the people that are doing the drive are well up in the air, you are not actually shooting at them. They come across, they will be firing shots in the air, the kids will be blowing horns or rattling marbles in tins and all that, making

as much noise as they possibly can. If anything comes running out, then we have got the shooters lined up there to get them. Sometimes we are successful, sometimes we are not.

We do the day shoot in September, and we do three night shoots now, which are organised. During the night shoots there is usually one person on the causeway to block it off. Same thing: we advertise, block the island off, leave one person on the causeway, but we go with 'less is best' at night. There are only three on the island: one with the rifle, one with the shotgun and one person with their lights. If there is anything close, they can shoot it with the shotgun or, if it is shooting away from the town, they have a shot with the rifle.

As I said, we are relatively successful. We got two there last year in the morning, and a few of the people had gone home. There you can see the fellows with the orange caps — they were all standing along the tracks so you can see them. Sometimes, as I said, we get none. On the last night shoot we had we found the den, so we have marked the den. It is a bit hard to see because it was only our phones and it was late. That den had probably 20 carcasses in it and more on the outside. We think the bitches were getting carcasses for some pups and were starting to do a bit of a stockpile with the mutton-birds. You can see they have been partially chewed on and eaten.

We can get that now and, as Richard said, rather than doing baiting anywhere, we can actually bait that den. The den system there back across behind the people — at the very far left person there, the den system is in there — is in a limestone cave system. The department tried gassing it, but it is just too big so it dissipates and does not seem to work. The foxes go on and off the island too. There are only two dens there. We have been sitting there all night, we have left, and as we are backing out, foxes come walking around where we have been sitting blocking the island off and walk across. So while we only do the island, it is the rest of the coast that is probably a bit hard.

A lot of our shooters are involved in vermin groups. The Hawkesdale vermin control group is one of them. They shoot every weekend, and probably the biggest issue they have is when they are shooting around farmers' land, private farms, and they are driving foxes when they come up and, as Richard said, when you come up to a block of Crown land the foxes just scoot straight into it. If we had permission to be able to go onto that, we could finish it off, because in some places it is totally surrounded. We have done shoots at Tower Hill on behalf of Warnambool Field and Game, but it is pretty big — the sheer size of it and the amount of people you need — and there is lots of other wildlife as well. Pallisters Reserve and, as he said, the Basalt to Bay we have done a bit of as well.

The cost we do not mind. We get a meat voucher for the butchers, and those blokes eat most of it after. We have the barbecue when we finish, so everyone is pretty happy with them. We are happy to do it as a community thing. The public will come up. They see a lot of people standing there with guns and they are pretty hesitant, and then when you tell them what they are doing they change altogether. It is a good thing. We have got very good responses from the public. We even had a bus load of people from Korea who thought we could shoot around them — they did not mind — but you would be a bit hesitant on that sort of thing.

Other than that, as we said, the groups that do get out shooting run into the snag of having to get permission to shoot on the public land. Sometimes it is okay, but I probably feel if it was a bit more of a programmed approach they would know where they were going every weekend. Like some of these people shoot 300 or 400 foxes a year as a group, so they cover a lot of territory, but they do not really like to go onto a lot of those little closed-in braces of Crown land. We need a mechanism to be able to get approval to do it, I think, if we are conducting shoots around them. As I said, Richard has covered most things. I am happy to answer any questions and see how we go.

The ACTING CHAIR — Thank you very much for that. I did not actually realise the migration cycle was that big for the birds. It is something I know little about.

Mr EVANS — Two years ago they had a lot of headwinds and missed a lot of food because the wind blew them back. You can remember people fishing at Portland who could not get their bait in the water because the mutton-birds were that hungry. As soon as they were throwing the bait in the water they would just swamp on it. So they would throw a bit of bait that way and then drop their line in that side. They were

just starving. So they are pretty easy for the foxes to get. You go for a walk around the island, and there are carcasses everywhere — and that is only the ones we see.

The ACTING CHAIR — Yes, it is pretty incredible.

Mr EVANS — We have shot cats there too. Twice we have had cats on there with mutton-birds in their mouths. The signs are there — no dogs or animals on the island at all — so we figured if the cat has got the mutton-bird, it is fair game.

The ACTING CHAIR — Yes, absolutely. Something that has been talked about a lot throughout this committee is the difference between recreational shooters and professional shooters. You are obviously on one side of that and you are representing a group who are a really actively engaged group of recreational shooters, but can you talk me through what you believe the difference might be between recreational and professional shooters? Is there a degree of competency that might be a defining point between them, or are recs able to do the same job?

Mr EVANS — People use our field and game members because of the indemnity that field and game covers people for, which is probably a good thing for them. Professional shooters would have to be insured and everything as well. I do not think there is much to turn you into a professional shooter from a recreational shooter. You could be one or the other, I think, if you really wanted to be, other than you are charging for your services. We prefer to do this type of thing as a group and a club for the positive feedback through the media and for shooting as a whole, because after 1996 we really struggled as shooting groups. People just were not game to say what they did as their hobby on the weekend, and this sort of thing gives us really positive feedback. That is why we do it. As far as professional, I am not sure that there is a big difference between a professional and a very competent recreational shooter, because I think you will find most of the professionals are probably competent recreational shooters as well.

The ACTING CHAIR — And as far as things like the practice of how you do it, obviously this type of thing, having a drive, takes a fair bit of manpower so it is probably less appropriate for a professional. They would not be able to pull that sort of thing off; it would be a different method of doing it.

Mr EVANS — That is right, and as Richard said it is a bit hit and miss. We got stuck on their last year on one of our night shoots with the rough weather and high tide. It came in, and we were there for 2 hours until the tide went down over the causeway. But the professional bloke would look at it and think: 'I'm not going out there tonight'. We try and stick to the dates that we set because we feel it has been advertised for that day and the police know that we are there that day and the district firearms officer knows we are there, so there is a whole network of people that know what is going on. You cannot easily change the day, especially when you have advertised it will be Wednesday night and you go rocking up on Thursday — people get a bit upset. We do not want the bad media; we prefer to be seen in a good light. As I said, we do it because we enjoy it and it is more of a community thing.

The ACTING CHAIR — As far as the ethics of what you do, could you just walk us through some of the things that the rec groups talk about in relation to humane kills and things like that and if that is an important part?

Mr EVANS — With the island itself, in the last few years the Friends of Griffiths Island have done a really good job of getting rid of a lot of the scrub and the hiding places, so the only issue we are up against now is the length of the grass. It is so thick and high. The spotlighting shooting has probably turned out to be the best because we can actually see them, whereas in grass that high you have just got no hope of seeing them.

As far as the ethical killing, it is a high-powered rifle and it is pretty direct with the positive identification in the light, because it is not a long way across. You are probably looking at 150 metres as your farthest point where they are shooting from if you are in the centre of the island. It is usually the one shot and one kill sort of thing — killed virtually straightaway. Those two ran onto the track and were 10 or 12 metres from one bloke and the same from the second one. So they were dispatched pretty quickly. There is no lingering death if that is the sort of thing.

The ACTING CHAIR — You mentioned the perspective of the public on what you do and how that changed in 1996 and shooters were perceived in a different light. I am wondering if you could talk about your experience with that, how you think it has changed and whether any of that is as a result of this but also the cultural significance of what you are doing, because you mentioned you involve kids and other volunteers and things like that. Is it a community thing that you want to hand down?

Mr EVANS — It is now. If you look recently, one of our first gold medals at the Olympics was the clay target shooting. I have been a member of the ACTA since 1981. As I said, I joined field and game in 1998 not because of any issues with the 1996 problems but because it was a different method of shooting. If you are out field shooting and that sort of thing, it is more suited to that. I am still a member of both and enjoy both, but in two weeks time we have got a come and try day at our club, so it is advertised for that.

We had 24 turn up for that last year. We put out the ads saying: ‘Come and have a go; we will teach you’. Our firearms officer comes up and runs people through the issues of how to get their gun licence and the safety of carting your guns, storing your guns and that sort of thing. Then we bring them out and set up some targets for them to shoot — fairly easy ones but just to let them have a go. We get low recoil loads. Last year out of the 24 I think there were 14 girls. They all enjoyed it and had a good day. It was funny how six turned up and said, ‘We’ve always wanted to do it, but we were never game’. They went away and told people how great it was and said, ‘Oh no, there’s no need to be scared’. People have a funny idea of a gun club — that people are walking around waving guns around in the air.

Admittedly, though, after 1996 with the attitudes towards guns and shooters themselves, we went into a bit of a shell, I suppose. ‘What do you do on the weekend?’, you would say, ‘We’re involved in the footy club’, and that type of thing. You did not say, ‘I’m a shooter. I shoot clay targets’, and that sort of thing. But I think the Olympics has really helped it, and field and game being out there more often and being more involved in decisions around hunting and that type of thing as well can only be for the better. I do not mind telling people what I do now anyway. We do not get any bad reactions to it.

The ACTING CHAIR — That is good. I have got two little girls and I cannot wait to get them involved so they can do the same sorts of things that I did when I was growing up.

Mr EVANS — I have got the grandson knocking at the door. He is mad to go. He turns 12 on Friday and he is old enough to get his junior permit, so I know where you are coming from.

The ACTING CHAIR — You mentioned hunting around other areas, and I am assuming it is not just foxes. There would be a lot of rabbit shooting and things like that.

Mr EVANS — Yes, we do.

The ACTING CHAIR — And the issues there — you run into boundaries. So you are doing it on private property, you are running into boundaries and those boundaries are public land. Can you explain what seems to be the biggest problem — what type of public lands they are that you are seeing the most problems in, whereabouts they are, just a general sort of description?

Mr EVANS — Yes. With Griffiths Island, the island is fine, but back to the other side of Port Fairy — the other way — you can see all that land on that beach around there and the road. There is no housing on anything there, and the foxes tend to come out of that as well. You can drive around there at night, especially when folk festivals are on, and there are foxes walking around there everywhere. So while we only do the island, it is pretty easy to say if foxes hear a bit of noise, they will bolt off and get out or not go there.

The other places where they run into is out around Orford — the likes of Pallisters reserve and those places out there where it is a reserve. It is a reserve, people shoot around it and foxes get into it. Probably something as a group we need to do more is contact them and say, ‘We are scheduling doing this farm on X weekend. Is it okay if we go in?’. But the trouble with Pallisters reserve is there are a lot of people in there collecting seeds and that sort of thing as well. It is not a closed reserve. With Tower Hill, I know around Koroit there are foxes everywhere. I have lost chooks. I am on the edge of Tower Hill, and it is just

huge. I do not know how you do it. The baiting can be indiscriminate. There are other animals around as well.

But I think we need an easier way to contact the department and say, 'This weekend we're shooting up at Caramut. In the middle of the four farms we're shooting, and on this location there's a reserve. How do we get permission to go through there? Do we have to advertise? Can we go in there first, make sure there's no-one there and then, if we're all around it, go in and get the foxes out of it basically?'. We need an easier way to do that, like just a quick approval system. And there are not many, but some of them are fairly large.

You get in the coastal areas and you get into the dunes and then you run into different coastal groups. Do we have to go to the department or the coastal group, like the Killarney Landcare group? How far do they extend? Where do we go to the department, Parks Victoria and that sort of thing?

The ACTING CHAIR — You are talking about an easier process. It would suggest that sometimes in many of these areas the only inhibitor for actually hunting in those places is the fact that it is a national park or a state park.

Mr EVANS — Yes, that is right. And people will say, 'We won't go in there'.

The ACTING CHAIR — We have this tenure that does not allow hunting. If there is no other reason except for the name of it — for example, if it is large enough, there is no visitation and it is not going to be a safety issue, and it is no different to, say, having a national park of one kind here and next to it a state forest that you can hunt in — would you agree, if there are no other safety issues, that you should be just allowed to hunt in there anyway?

Mr EVANS — I think so, yes. As long as there are no environmental things, so it could be a habitat for sugar gliders or some little animal or a bandicoot or something that you would have to be aware of. In saying that, as well, though, that is more likely where the foxes are going to be if there is a bandicoot habitat. We have also done fox shooting on the bandicoot land behind the water treatment plant in Hamilton. If we could get in there while you have got a lot of people out on the shoot anyway — if you said, 'Look, we can do that next weekend', you might end up with 10 people, but if you have got 40 on the day — it would be a whole lot easier to cover an area like that.

I suppose a mechanism to be able to do it and go in and do it without getting into trouble, that is the issue. It is what is conceived to be okay and what is not okay. It is a bit like you do not want to do the wrong thing and go onto someone's land without asking. If it is Crown land, you should ask someone first. I think a lot of times when you try to contact people, it will be, 'Ring Daniel', and he will say, 'No, ring Vicki', and then she will say, 'No, ring Simon', and he will say, 'Ring Daniel'. So you go around a bit.

The ACTING CHAIR — Welcome to bureaucracy!

Mr EVANS — Yes, exactly. So if we had an easier way to do it, I think we would make everyone's life a bit easier, and we would probably have better control of it, especially in some areas up around Victoria Valley and that, where you have got lambing and they back straight onto the Grampians National Park or onto the state forest and that sort of thing. Even in the wood cutting areas, there are foxes running around in there. I just think an easy way to get approval, unless you can apply as a club and say, 'Look, we have permission for the next two months to shoot on these areas on certain days' or something, that would good. That is not just the Warrnambool club; that could be Coleraine or the Grampians or any club. I think you will find most field and game clubs would be welcoming and warm to the idea that they could actually do that, and you would get a bit more interaction and involvement with them.

Ms WARD — So with the shoots and with the increase to the four shoots a year, have you noticed any change in foxes on the island or in the amount of birds that are being attacked or eaten or mauled?

Mr EVANS — Last year I think we got seven, and six of them were at night. The daytime one — I think we have sat and discussed it — I think the foxes come on. We actually start earlier now rather than later, so while it is 6 o'clock, it is not quite dark and they are out and about. Traditionally you would go out

really late to go fox shooting. We think what is happening is that they are not on the island — they are coming over, having a feed and then they are gone. So we get there in the morning and at 6 o'clock they are already off the island. You might get one in the den, but most of them are gone.

I know we sat there one night, I was with Barry Carr — from DSE, I think it was at the time, and whatever he was — and we could hear this crunching behind us. We turned around and there was a fox sitting there eating a bone behind us. We are sitting up as the big hunters and watching nothing coming off, but he was sitting behind us. He was just waiting for us to move, and he was going to trot onto the island. It is not hard; they just go into the burrow and grab a mutton-bird. A lot of the time they just grab the mutton-bird out, bite its head off and drink the blood out of it, and the carcass is there. They do not even eat the actual bird. I do not know if it is just to kill or if it is like when they kill chooks.

Ms WARD — And they do the same things with chickens.

Mr EVANS — Same as everywhere. Yes, it is the same as with the chickens. You will see all these carcasses around that have not got any real physical damage other than around the head and the neck, so whether it is just the kill to drink the blood or the thrill of it all or whatever, there was noticeably less last year towards the end of the year. Normally around April, when the chicks are ready to go, you will see carcasses everywhere. I went for a walk around and there were not a lot. There were carcasses there, but nowhere near the likes of what other previous years have been. But they did do a fairly extensive baiting program too.

As Richard said, the shire is probably hamstrung a bit as far as funding when you think that they have got to spread that not just on Griffiths Island; they have got to spread it around the whole shire. You do not want the shire saying, 'Everything is going to Port Fairy', and all that sort of thing, 'because it is the jewel of the shire'. I suppose their funding probably needs to be a bit more specific or targeted to species, I suppose.

Ms WARD — I am going to shift a little bit. In previous hearings we have had there has been mention about the GMA taking a more proactive role in monitoring this in working with recreational hunters to try and get more programs going. Do you think that there is a role for them to play?

Mr EVANS — There probably is, because we look to the GMA to announce when the duck season is going to be and announce when the quail season is going to be, so they have got probably the foot in the door to say with the government departments. I think probably through them they could work on easing up the rules as far as the Crown land goes. I am not sure on the deer shooting side of things; I have never been involved in it. I know they have a bit to do with that, but I think it is probably a good avenue for the likes of field and game, because the people in the GMA are field and game representatives. I think we cover a fairly wide selection of our society with that group that could interact with different departments and do that work for us.

Ms WARD — It has also been suggested that the GMA could be a good body to have a kind of a list that has responsible recreational shooters on it that other people who want shooters on their properties or elsewhere to help control populations could —

Mr EVANS — Yes, that is a good idea. Exactly. That happens now in New South Wales with the rice. You can register as a shooter, and the rice growers can look up that list and ring you to see if you are interested in going to shoot ducks in the rice. I do not see why it could not work. As I said, we get people. Probably half a dozen people last year rang, and there are a few of our people who just love going spotlighting. You just give them the address and tell them where to go, and they meet the people who show them where to go. Usually you give them a sandwich and a cup of tea to take with them, because they just appreciate it. If you lose a lamb at the minute, you lose a fair bit of money, or if you get a young calf with the tongue bitten out of it, well, that is a lot of money down the drain at the minute. People are quite happy to do it. These blokes do not mind; they get the scalp, and some of them will even provide the ammunition for them, so all of a sudden they think it is a win-win. They do not have to pay for the bullets, and off they go. So it would be a good idea — a register for groups like that for the GMA.

Ms WARD — Do you see any challenges coming out from a list or any problems that could arise from having such a list?

Mr EVANS — No, I do not think so. I cannot see any. It has probably been that someone knows somebody who knows someone. But if so, you could give them a call; like ring Anthony, and he will be able to put someone on to you. Whereas — —

Ms WARD — So you have got a series of informal lists at the moment.

Mr EVANS — Yes, that is right. So if I wanted to go shooting in, I do not know, north of Hamilton or Edenhope — somewhere that way — you would say, ‘Righto, here’s who you would ring here’, at either the department or, if you are in around Horsham or that way, Casterton, you’ve got all your department yards and depots and things. If you had a contact for those areas, it would be surprising how many people are interested in going fox shooting outside of their own area, because they do so much.

There are two groups that we have got. They shoot every weekend, and they probably involve 60 people. So if someone with footy cannot go on a Saturday, they will go with the other group on the Sunday, and vice versa. They tend to do this area, and one follows the others around about a fortnight later. They have got a good little circuit worked out so that they are not all arriving at the same pace at the same time unless they had to, which, if Tower Hill needed to be done, is what you would need — these two groups with that many people. Yes, I think that would work — a register. So you would register your name, and if you are interested in shooting somewhere, you can apply to someone and say, ‘I’m going to be here that date’, and, ‘I’ll give you a few names of people who have requested shooters’.

Ms WARD — So the idea has been around responsible shooters. How would you quantify that? How would you work out or how would you make a list of people who are known to be responsible?

Mr EVANS — I know field and game have a sheet that we fill in — a vermin report. So if any of our guys go out, they hand them in and they get logged. At the end of the year when you read that field and game members have shot 12 000 foxes, that is coming from those reports. I would say probably only about half of our people use them, because the other half maybe are not aware of them or cannot be bothered doing the paperwork. So to get a realistic idea of the number of foxes that are shot by recreational groups, you want to be strict on filling the paperwork in, because at the minute I think we are only probably getting a half or a third of the actual number. And we try to make people aware — you know, ‘Don’t forget if you go out shooting’, et cetera. We put it in our newsletter. We have a monthly newsletter, and if fox season starts we put a little note in: ‘Don’t forget if you go out, fill in the vermin report and we’ll submit it monthly’.

Ms WARD — Do you have a mechanism that records people who have not acted responsibly or that you think — —

Mr EVANS — Usually it is the police, you know what I mean, because someone will report them. The groups that I am involved with, I have to say, are all pretty responsible sorts of people, and you have to be. If you are a licensed shooter, you cannot go down the street and into the pub and punch someone in the nose, because if you love shooting, you are going to lose your gun. You cannot assault anyone; there are a lot of things you cannot do. You sit there and bite your tongue and you put up with a lot, and you have to, but I think just having a shooters licence makes you responsible.

I know that it is the same as having a car licence. Everyone should be responsible and you will probably have people that are not as responsible as others, but on the whole, once you get your shooters licence, if you love shooting, you have got to be very careful to keep it. You have really got to maintain a very high degree of responsibility and respect from people. As you said, the ones that are not responsible you usually read about in the court penalties. I think that is the best answer I can come up with.

Ms WARD — Thank you. That is good.

Mr RAMSAY — Well, Anthony, pretty slim pickings after Daniel and Vicki have torn through the question list. I think you have covered most of the questions I was going to ask.

In our own property at home, we have the Winchelsea Gun Club that comes regularly on a Sunday. Pre fox bounty we used to give them cartridges as a thankyou — they knock over 30 foxes on a weekend on their drives. The introduction of the fox bounty by the coalition government at the time provided almost an impetus for more to get out and hunt more regularly. Then this government cut that, and then they have reintroduced it again, presumably thinking it is perhaps not such a bad idea after all. I was just wondering, from your point of view and your organisation's point of view, whether the fox bounty, the wild dog bounty and whatever other bounties are out there are encouraging your membership to get out and about, and let us get some payment for the work that you are doing in relation to feral animal control.

Mr EVANS — It would have a huge impact. When I first started — probably around the mid 80s — there were people who worked on farms, but they made a living out of fox shooting, because they were getting \$40 or \$50 a skin when skins were worth a lot of money. They would go to all the trouble to peg it out and sell them. They would meet in Hamilton and Warrnambool. There would be skin buyers everywhere.

Then the prices dropped on the skins, and there was no incentive, I suppose, to go out and spend all that time. The government brought the bounty in, so you had to cut the tail off. If you cut the tail off, the skin was not worth as much without the tail; you might have only got \$10 for it. But I think if there is a bounty on, it is definitely worthwhile. People feel they are getting something out of it. I know these groups at the end of it will have a barbecue and a few beers and it is all paid for, and they pay for their cartridges and all that out of the bounty. They get enough money if they shoot 250 foxes to buy cartridges for everybody next year to do it. As I said, if you give the gun club some cartridges, that is a bonus at the end. I think the bounty is essential on them. As everyone would say, it should be more, but actually it is like anything — if it is \$10, it should be \$20. But there should definitely be a bounty on it, and I think if the bounty was substantial, you would see a lot more people back shooting.

Mr RAMSAY — I know we have talked about Griffiths Island, but has your field and game organisation been involved in organised Crown land shoots under the auspices of the GMA?

Mr EVANS — We have been doing Griffiths Island for about 38 years, I think — nearly 40 years.

Mr RAMSAY — But elsewhere?

Mr EVANS — We have done Tower Hill twice in that time — well, in my time. I have been there since 1998, and we have done Tower Hill twice. We have done a lot of other farms. We did do Pallisters Reserve, I think. Out in Yambuk or St Helens, we have done that once as well. And we did the bandicoot breeding area in Hamilton there behind the water treatment plant. That was with Barry Carr from the DSE, I think it was at the time, so from the department. Barry has since retired.

That is the other thing, I suppose. Barry retired, and we have not actually had any interaction with the department. It has all sort of moved into the council now. Before it was between the three. We would have the department and me meet there early. Now it is just me and the shire. I call Richard. He will confirm the dates and put the ads in and do all that, but the shire seems to be doing more of the control of it now as well, whereas there is no real input from the department at all.

Mr RAMSAY — Do you get paid by the department?

Mr EVANS — No. Richard instigated the \$100 meat voucher at the butcher's.

Mr RAMSAY — He has not got a lot of money to play with, so we heard.

Mr EVANS — Yes, that is right. We really appreciate the fact that we get that. As I said, our come-and-try day, our last night shoot, was probably one of the coldest November nights we have had for years, and windy, so the blokes who went out there all appreciated a hamburger and a sausage at our come-and-try day. We will put on the barbecue for the Christmas shoot and the come-and-try day, and it does not cost us anything. There are 250 people who could benefit out of the work that four did, but it is all as a club. An incentive like that, if they said, 'We'll buy a case of cartridges for you, and you can organise the shoot through this area', we would be quite up for that sort of thing.

The ACTING CHAIR — With those shoots, council have told us that they sort of let you choose who goes and who does not and what the make-up of the group is, and you are fairly autonomous in that sense. What amount of supervision is there for the actual shoots, or is there any involvement?

Mr EVANS — Yes. As I said, we are there early. Our district firearms officer is there, so we have got police presence as well. Mick Gloury is there with his jacket on with ‘Victoria Police’ on the back. Before we go, there is a bit of a discussion on who is going to be doing what — ‘When you people are walking over the hill, these fellows will be spread along the track’ — so people know where it is. The people spread along the track are pretty experienced. They are some of the older members of the group and a few of the younger ones, but they are probably some of our most competent shooters. The people coming over the hill are encouraged to make as much noise as they like. There are probably two people there firing shots in the air, so they are not shooting at anything on the ground and the rest is just noise. But before we go we make sure we tell everyone where everyone is going to be — ‘When you get to the top of the hill, you’ll be able to see everyone lined up, and just beware’, and everyone waits. So you normally know that there are 15. If you can see 15 people coming over the hill, you are pretty right.

The ACTING CHAIR — But is there no ongoing supervision?

Mr EVANS — No, there is none at all. It is well explained before we go — ‘Just remember where you’re shooting, where you’re going to see. If you see something and you can’t get a shot at it, yell out to someone else and let them have a go at it, but don’t put anyone in danger’, sort of things.

The ACTING CHAIR — With the GMA, what is your experience with the GMA and how it is working? It has only been around for a couple of years. Do they have much involvement with this sort of thing? Do you think they should have more?

Mr EVANS — I would like to see them have more. I think it is a good idea. I suppose it gets some experience from both sides. Nothing against our politicians — none in this room, anyway —

Mr RAMSAY — Nicely done.

Mr EVANS — but a lot of them may get a portfolio that they are not totally experienced with. I think to have the representatives from these different groups with the politicians probably makes their job a lot easier too. I think the GMA is doing a pretty good job, to be honest — really good. It is probably one of the best things that has come out.

Mr RAMSAY — Roger Hallam loves shooting. I think he is the last chair. They do not have a chair at the moment, do they?

The ACTING CHAIR — He was until he quit through frustrations in not being able to do what they can in the GMA.

Mr RAMSAY — He is still a shooter, though.

The ACTING CHAIR — Thank you very much for coming. If we do have follow-up questions or anything that might come out of it, would you be happy that we contact you and chase up anything?

Mr EVANS — Yes, no problem at all. Thanks for the opportunity. I have appreciated it.

Ms WARD — Thanks for taking the time out to see us. We appreciate it.

The ACTING CHAIR — No worries.

Mr EVANS — I hope you like those pictures of dead animals.

Witness withdrew.