

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land

Melbourne — 5 December 2016

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Mr Phil Ingamells, Victorian National Parks Association.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the public hearing of the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee in relation to the inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land. Welcome to Mr Phil Ingamells from the Victorian National Parks Association. Before I hand over to you to provide your presentation, I will just say that everything you say in this public hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, that is not necessarily the case for any comments made outside of this public hearing. We are recording what is being said today, and you will receive a proof copy of the transcript to check for accuracy prior to it becoming public. With that perhaps I will hand over to you. If you would not mind giving just a little bit of your background and your role and interest in this subject, then we will go to the questions. If you could speak for about 5 or 10 minutes to your presentation, if that is okay?

Mr INGAMELLS — It will be about 10 minutes.

The CHAIR — Okay. Please do not let it go any longer because we need to ask you questions.

Mr INGAMELLS — No, that is fine.

The CHAIR — Okay, good. Thank you.

Visual presentation.

Mr INGAMELLS — Just very briefly the VNPA has been active in Victoria since the 1950s. We are a very longstanding conservation organisation. We do not just deal with the protection of national parks; we deal with biodiversity right across the state. We were given that name back in the 1950s because national parks were the prime objective at that point, so we were dealing with public land, private land and the terrestrial and marine environment. My role there, though, having said that, is to increase and improve the level of management for the national parks system and to lobby for better protection of our protected areas.

Just as a very quick one on the presentation, that is a very rough map of the broad vegetation types in Victoria pre European settlement. It is a very complex thing and you can actually break that down more within those areas. This is what we are left with now. So we are the most cleared area in the state. Most of our natural areas are fragmented. Some vegetation types are almost completely missing. It is a real problem. It makes it a very difficult thing to manage, particularly because fragmented areas are subject to weed invasion. I will just go through that briefly again. That is what we had pre European and that is what we are left with.

We actually host around 100 000 native species; that is our inheritance. DELWP's advisory list for plants alone lists 1000 endangered, vulnerable or rare native plants, so it is a real problem to protect that. It is a very, very difficult task that this generation of people are faced with. We can lose it, basically. We can lose a very large amount of it. That is a plant that actually comes up after fire; it is a fire-loving plant. There are a whole lot of other things. Most of them, however, are fungi and invertebrates. If you look at that, that is relative to their size and how many of those things there are. So on the left you see the vertebrates — the birds and the mammals and so on — a very small part of the native species we have. Most of them are fungi and insects and things like that.

Maybe they do not matter to most people because they very rarely see them, or if they do, they just sort of squash them or something. It is an instinctive thing with insects. But they are the things that actually hold ecosystems together. So in our big natural areas, where you have just an incredible complex of things happening — water comes out pure and crystal-like; the clearest thing on earth. That is part of that very strange thing about intact ecosystems. They are remarkable things and people are studying them to work out how that happens.

You have also got, in terms of those sorts of things, a huge number of future medicinal compounds, industrial compounds and all sorts of things — this genetic material is actually what we do. It is protected globally under the international Convention on Biological Diversity and nationally under the Environment Protection Act — these are our natural areas — and statewide under a whole range of acts, including the National Parks Act. The international Convention on Biological Diversity is a worldwide thing, signed up to by most countries on earth, and Australia was one of the first to sign up and ratify it, to establish

protected areas, to implement plans and other management strategies to do that, and to control and eradicate species. These are the things we do.

In terms of reference 1, which I am sure you are very well aware of, the trials so far by Parks Victoria have been experimental. They have removed very small numbers of deer compared to the populations, which are variably estimated in submissions at between half a million and a million deer across the state, just for example. They have been very small so far. They have been very carefully managed by Parks Victoria but the budget was absolutely inadequate. There was no commitment to follow-up action, partly because of the budget thing — and that is critical in any pest eradication process. It is entirely dependent on accredited volunteers, and we actually support that accreditation of volunteers in this program; there is no issue there. But they are largely limited to areas close to Melbourne, there is limited time when people are available and they are limited in the means they can use, as we have heard — silencers, the capacity for aerial attack and various other things like that. So although the accreditation of professionals is really the process, it is not the only thing.

The second term of reference: there are just a few things there. It is a very big question. The goat eradication programs that Parks Victoria has done have used accredited amateurs but particularly have used professional shooters to actually seal the deal, if you like. That is an important part of that thing, to actually use professionals. And feral horse management in the High Country is a whole other issue which you are also well aware of. Again it requires a strategic mix of programs. That is clear in the New South Wales investigation and the strategy that has come from New South Wales and Victoria. In remote areas you will need professional shooters to actually deal with that problem humanely and effectively. But the other really important thing there is to coordinate a cross-border program with New South Wales, because the main population of feral horses is a cross-border population into the Kosciuszko National Park. So those are two things that I want to mention there.

In terms of 3, the relative cross-benefits and so on, there is a lot of talk about expanding amateur hunting. The Victorian experience of an exploding deer population despite a very large amateur deer harvest should be enough evidence that simply expanding hunting opportunities is not the answer, and I do not believe it is an effective answer there. Amateur shooters concentrate their attention on relatively accessible areas, allowing healthy and large breeding populations elsewhere in remote areas. There is a tendency to target trophy stags that are quickly replaced. Importantly, it is very hard to get strategic culling in areas where the most vulnerable ecosystems are being damaged, and that damage is very real, as has been put forward in a number of things already.

There are also significant safety issues, and I just thought I would mention that. I noticed the mountain cattlemen talked about rogue hunters and I noticed, Simon, that you were talking about the same sort of thing on your farm. I would just like to throw in two things. One is that — I cannot remember the submissions I have seen, but they were claiming that no-one has ever been killed by hunters. Somebody just alerted me yesterday actually that Gary Patterson, aged 20, was killed when walking his dog in the Yarra State Forest near Warburton in 1999. There were two hunters who killed him by mistake. He was wounded but he eventually died.

But there are also instances of people disappearing, like Warren Meyer at Mount Dom Dom in the Yarra Ranges National Park, and there was a very large inquiry into that. His mobile phone and GPS registered, but there was nothing even though he was very well-equipped. He just mysteriously disappeared and they knew there were hunters in that area. These are things that I just came across yesterday in a very brief period of time, and I think it is worthwhile investigating that.

I would also add, and this is absolutely true, that in the mid to late 1980s I was with a group of friends in Kooyoorra State Park. We were having a picnic. It was a beautiful summer evening and we were among some great boulders. I was standing up at the time and a car came up and a shot rang out and it came past my ear. I know the sound very well. If anyone has ever been close enough to a bullet, it does not go straight and it goes surprisingly slowly. It was probably around 100 metres away but it made a sort of whistling, rotating sound.

Mr TILLEY — Whistling?

Mr INGAMELLS — Well, it made sort of whirring, I suppose, more than a whistling. I cannot whirl and find out but — —

Mr TILLEY — Not a crack?

Mr INGAMELLS — The bullet — there was a bang from the gun, but as it came past me it was a rotating, whirring sound, yes.

Mr TILLEY — That is not accurate. If it is a full-on shot, it should be a crack, thump.

Mr INGAMELLS — It did not hit me.

Mr TILLEY — No. That is the noise of a projectile travelling at speed. It goes — —

Mr YOUNG — If you could hear it, it was most likely a ricochet; it was not actually the shot.

The CHAIR — But what you are identifying is a bullet. Whatever the sound was, it was a bullet.

Mr INGAMELLS — It was certainly a very big mosquito! That is all I can tell you. I rather foolishly leapt up and gave out every swear word I had known. There were a few car doors that banged, and they took off at very high speed. I do not think we reported that to the police. Basically we were there, just staying the night. We were miles away from where we had walked in, so we just left it to the morning. By the morning those people were probably miles away. I was at the stage a very junior person in the parks service. I mentioned it to people there, but they said, ‘What can we do?’. It is probably one of those many instances that do not get reported. I have met hunters in the bush and I see them and most of the people I have met have been enormously responsible. However, there are rogue people out there and it is really dangerous.

I would actually rather go on to the thing. I just wanted to make that point that that is an issue. I just want to keep going with this.

Mr TILLEY — Yes, go on.

Mr INGAMELLS — The most effective pest control strategy is always early intervention. Failing that, the most cost-effective technique is one that has a target that brings the pest population down to a level that is relatively easy to manage in the long term. Just nipping off bits of the population all the time just leads to a totally ineffective thing or a really costly ongoing thing. Early intervention is by far the best, and that is where we have totally failed on most of those issues now.

I want to point out also just a bit of understanding. That is rather like a version of the map of what is left. The pink areas are parks, the green areas are state forests and the yellow areas are other Crown land. So there is already a very large part of the state open to hunters. I just wanted to make that point very quickly.

You have seen these issues of damage. I will just go through them. This is actually at the O’Shannassy aqueduct. Even the smaller areas of damage add up to quite a considerable water issue. These are all just in a short distance along the O’Shannassy aqueduct.

This is just from someone walking along, just photographing as they walked along. It is all deer damage, as I understand it.

This is more recent. This is more recently, a slide by Melbourne Water in the Cardinia Reservoir. The original estimate of deer in there was around 600. They designed a cull to remove 200 over a 12-month period. In the first stage of the thing, which was just recently, in October, it went for three days in which they culled 91 deer. That is half of their cull for the entire year in three days. They contracted professional marksmen. They could operate in what was defined as a populous place with visual ID, with thermal imaging and night scopes. There were humane kills with head shots using silencers, and carcasses were removed the same day. That cost money, but it actually worked, and they really should be more ambitious and aim at more than the 200.

The CHAIR — Any idea of the cost?

Mr INGAMELLS — No, I have not got that. I have only just recently heard about this. I just want to go to what we see as the solutions. We need well-informed statewide feral animal containment strategies based on the need to protect vulnerable ecosystems and species. They have to be cross-tenure programs — and sometimes cross-state programs, obviously — capable of protecting the integrity of the national parks and public land in the long term.

The other thing is we need absolutely serious research into effective, humane biological, genetic and other controls. The science has moved on vastly since the days of cane toads and things like that. There are people waiting for it but there is virtually no investment in control of these species through the enormous research now in genetic analysis of targeted species and so on. It just needs to be really and absolutely looked at because basically you are not going to be able to shoot everything or catch them and humanely re-home them and all sorts of things like that. You just need to do that.

The other thing we need is adequate dedicated funding for pest management programs across the state, and transparent allocation of that funding. Currently DELWP hands some money to PV to manage their parks system. Part of that money is clearly dedicated to pest management. By the time it gets down to park offices often there is literally zero money at the moment for pest management in some park offices — zero. So they would have had to abandon the small program they were doing last year, which means that that program was a total waste of money. It is absolutely important (a) to have adequate funding but (b) to have it clearly allocated for pest management through the parks system and elsewhere, I think.

The CHAIR — Just on that, from what I can gather, a lot of the money for eradication or control of pests is grants based, so you apply for a small grant to do something. Do you think that is the better way, that it is given to the community in a sense to do it, or do you think there needs to be more of a coordinated thing?

Mr INGAMELLS — There are certainly roles for the community in all this, but it absolutely has to be coordinated. It is interesting you say it is for the community. I mean, Parks Victoria actually employs people to get funds from CMAs, other institutions and things like that and from the federal government. They actually act like an NGO in some places to save staff the funds. The famous thing — it is not the right name for it — was that when they sold Telstra vast amounts of money that went from Telstra went to community programs and land management right across the state. It was completely unstrategic. I cannot remember the figure now. A very large amount of money was wasted. People who were doing weed control would apply for weed control there, leaving the weeds upstream. Then a year or two later, when that money went, it was just back where it was. Community involvement is really useful in this. Our members are involved in a lot of those programs too, but it absolutely has to be strategic.

Mr RAMSAY — You are happy to table the report to the committee so we can use it?

Mr INGAMELLS — You are welcome to have this, yes.

Mr YOUNG — You have alluded to the fact you do not think hunters are a viable way of controlling pests.

Mr INGAMELLS — Not unstrategic amateur hunting, yes.

Mr YOUNG — But the fact remains that the only method of control that is taking 70 000 deer out of our population of deer in Victoria at the moment is done by recreational hunters, and there has been a hell of a lot of anecdotal evidence to suggest that hunting in areas in which it occurs has led to lower populations. You have gone to that point in your own submission, where you have said that:

The amateur harvest is large where deer are in abundance, but is much smaller where the deer are in smaller numbers, allowing populations to re-establish.

It is quite obvious that those areas where they are in smaller numbers are areas that have got a lower hunting pressure. Given that it is reducing numbers in areas that are hunted, on what basis are you suggesting that recreational hunting is not having an impact?

Mr INGAMELLS — It probably goes to my quote in the *Weekly Times*, which has been made a little bit more famous by the cattlemen, where I was partially quoted in the *Weekly Times*. We are not opposed to recreational hunting, full stop — okay? If and where they have a benefit, that is really good, but even where they reduce populations, those populations come in from other areas and things like that. It is a bigger problem than that. I grew up in the 50s when every second person had a gun to shoot rabbits. We would get rabbits for our dinner all the time. That was what people ate, and things like that. It did nothing to solve the rabbit problem. Everyone with a few chooks out in the backyard had been shooting foxes since the beginning of the 19th century somewhere. It did not stop the fox problem. So you can cut down the number of people, but to actually deal with the pest problem, you have to be strategic. That is where the fox baiting programs have had quite a good effect in various places and it is where various biological controls for rabbits have had an effect.

You actually have to work out what your problem is, what your strategy is to deal with it and focus on that. I think the whole recreational hunting and expanding that as part somehow or other of the solution is diverting attention away from the things that will actually work. I think recreational hunters have plenty of space to go, but there are also issues with Parks. This comes into the thing of now where there was a plan to have separate campgrounds for hunters and for other people. Parks Victoria said that was not manageable because they did not have authority to check for firearms. They are obviously nervous to do that sort of work anyway, because this came up in the previous discussion. I think it is pretty hard.

I have been in campgrounds, and Wonnangatta is a classic example, where there are hunters all over the place. With the ambience of the place for the average family with mum, dad and the kids and everything else, you have guns going off at night. We approached them, because we were actually setting traps for animals and things like that — these are pit traps where you find out where the animal is and just research stuff — and they were really cooperative. We told them we would be out at dusk and at dawn and things like that, and they said, ‘That’s fine. Thanks for telling us. We’ll keep away’.

I did think it was slightly remarkable the hunters did not actually approach us. They were good, they were responsible, they were careful and they were well behaved. There is no issue like that, but I think there is a fair way to go in that issue. The reality is that there are rogue hunters; there are rogue drivers; there are rogue real estate agents. These people do inevitably exist. I think until you have really been pretty sure about this process of public safety and the effect on — —

You talk about the economy of it. Parks have an enormous contribution to international tourism. It is huge, and it is growing really, really fast. I think you have to really protect the visitor experience, and I think that is a really important thing to do.

Mr YOUNG — To pick up on a couple of things you said, you believe there is plenty of space for hunters to go, and I am sure they can be put down to a personal opinion rather than a statement of fact, because a lot of hunters would probably have the opposite view — that they do not have enough space to go. Suggesting that there is plenty of space to go is a personal view, but it is also not relevant to what we are talking about, and that is the effectiveness. You want to go down the path of having strategic planning and things like that. If we take a step backwards and say, ‘Well, okay, over the history of the state we’ve had these areas which you can hunt in and these areas which you can’t hunt in’ — to make it simple, state forests versus national parks — it is becoming widely accepted that the deer problem in state forests and the problem of many other pest species is a lot lower than it is in national parks. Whether it is causation or not is a debatable point, but the next step to find that out is to open more national parks to hunting to see if the same effects happen there, and if we start reducing the numbers of feral animals in those national parks — —

Mr INGAMELLS — You say there is evidence, but everyone tells me that it is really hard to count deer, so I am not sure what your evidence is. I have not seen the evidence, so that is one thing. The other thing is that we have actually met with some of the senior people in the ADA. I do not know if they told the same thing to you, and I hope I am not misrepresenting them — it is really up to you to check with them — but they were saying that they do not get quite as much pleasure out of hunting these days because when they got into it they used to stalk a deer and that was the whole pleasure of the thing. Now it is actually just too easy to come across one, and they were quite in favour of a significant reduction in the

number of deer. So that is the sort of thing I am basing what I am saying on — that there are plenty of opportunities for people to get deer.

Mr YOUNG — I do not think anyone is going to disagree. We all want to see a significant reduction in the number of deer, and I completely agree that they are very hard to count. We do not know, and that has been one of the things that has come up.

Mr INGAMELLS — You can tell me — and I cannot remember the figure; I am hopeless with figures — how many hectares are available for hunters.

Mr YOUNG — I would not know off the top of my head.

Mr INGAMELLS — It is very big.

Mr YOUNG — It is, and it is also a very big number of hectares that are not available. Other than the simple fact that this land tenure is a particular type and is excluding hunters, geographically there is no difference as far as usage and visitor rates go. There is no difference from the piece of land next to it that is a state forest. Given that there are areas of national park that are no different to places where you are allowed to hunt, the only reason you are not being allowed to is because it is a national park. What is stopping us from allowing that? And then secondly, given that, it is anecdotal evidence, but it has become very clear that there is a bigger problem in national parks with deer than there is in state forests.

Mr INGAMELLS — It is because it is a big problem. I am not going to go into that. It would be really good to see the evidence; I would love to. Absolutely. But I have not seen it, sorry. National parks are different. They are in legislation, they are there to protect flora and fauna, they are there for the visitor experience and they are there quite specifically to control pest plants and animals. Those three things are the prime objectives of the national parks, and the prime objective is to protect the natural systems of flora and fauna that are in there. I have seen no evidence that recreational hunting is going to do that. There are areas of national parks where recreational hunters are in there. There is no evidence that I have seen or that anybody else has seen.

Parks Victoria, which is absolutely starved of money, rather than just opening up areas to recreational hunting has chosen to use accredited hunters, and we totally approve of that program. They know and they have said, and I think it is in their submission or in the whole-of-government submission, that that needs to be boosted by the use of professional hunters. I am not quite sure why anyone would object to that. That is just employment. It is good for the economy to employ people and to increase that expertise, and there is nothing unusual about that. These are the people who are professional pest control people.

You have to aim at success. I have not seen any evidence that simply opening areas to amateur hunting will do that. I do think it will have an impact on park visitors if it simply becomes a territory for professional hunters. It will definitely have an effect on tourism, and I do not think you can justify that. There is ample opportunity. If I wanted to go hunting today, I would not have trouble finding somewhere to go.

Mr YOUNG — You have identified a few reasons why you do not think recreational hunting is the answer, one of them being amateur shooters concentrating their attention on relatively accessible areas and not getting into the deeper, more remote areas. They only target trophy stags and leave alone breeding females.

Mr INGAMELLS — They tend to target trophy stags. I did not say they only target them.

Mr YOUNG — There is no strategic culling in areas that are most vulnerable ecosystems that are being damaged. Those are the things that you believe are stopping recreational hunters from being effective. What would you think if we started addressing some of those key criteria? If we start directing recreational hunters towards areas that are most vulnerable ecosystems, we start educating to take more does than we do trophy stags, and we start concentrating recreational shooters into more remote places by providing better access for them to get in and out of them, and if those things were addressed, what would be your

position on recreational hunting then if we can overcome the things that you have identified are holding it back?

Mr INGAMELLS — I think that would probably improve the situation. It will not be anything like what it would be with professional hunters.

Mr YOUNG — What evidence do you have of that? Professional hunters take a very limited number of animals per year under contract because they are simply not being funded, whereas we know the numbers that are being taken by recreational hunters are up to 70 000-odd a year.

Mr INGAMELLS — I cannot offer you proof or statements like that, but as I have said before, I am not the person to plan pest management of any species in Victoria. I am not doing that. I am not putting myself up as that. I am simply saying that you have to have well-informed pest management that will succeed, and you have to get all the experts, all the science and all the people; it is not one person's ideas that are going to get this across. You have to pull those in, and the purpose is not to simply reduce the numbers; the purpose is to protect the ecosystems. Right?

The other thing is that you have to absolutely protect the visitor experience in national parks — that is, a visitor experience known worldwide, and it is huge. If you proclaim a national park in Victoria, people come to it. It has been there all the time, but they will come to it. They expect to be able to walk and to have the ambience that you have in a national park. They want to enjoy a natural area that is well managed and well looked after. It is just you have to protect your experiences. It is really important.

The other thing I would point out — and I have not got any of this yet, and I have not put it in my submission — is that there is an increasing body of evidence that by protecting that experience people can go where they do not hear cars, where they do not hear things and certainly where they do not hear guns in relation to this. It is enormously important for public health. There are long-term economic benefits not just for troubled adults but for young kids in trouble — all those sorts of things — in getting those experiences and going out and really testing themselves in the wild and all that sort of stuff. These sorts of things have enormous long-term benefits — economic benefits apart from public health benefits — for the community.

Mr McCURDY — Aren't we all talking about the same thing, though, Phil?

Mr INGAMELLS — Yes.

Mr McCURDY — We are still trying to protect the parks at the end of the day. This is not about ongoing game hunting in national parks; this is about how we can protect the parks and get them back to where they would be beneficial over the decades to come, rather than letting things get out of hand.

Mr INGAMELLS — I am not saying that you are not trying to protect the parks. I was not saying that. I am just saying: which is the way to do it? I think you have to have something that is not going to reduce the number in some sort of way. I am not sure if you were in the room when I was talking about this, but I just cited examples from my youth. When everybody was hunting rabbits, it did not reduce the rabbit population. It might have killed a lot of rabbits, but the rabbit population continued to grow. People have been shooting foxes for the last 100 years. They have killed a large number of foxes, but the fox population continued to grow.

You have to have a strategic program that actually aims at success. I think that will involve most particularly and most effectively professional hunters. I am not saying there should be a reduction in the hunting area available; I think that is enough. But I think that you have really got to get serious about this — professional hunters — and I think you need absolutely research into biological and genetic controls to do that. There is virtually no money spent. It is really quite odd that there is virtually no money and no funding for that. It is the stuff that we are so much better at than we were 20, 30 or 40 years ago. Now that they can do gene analysis and all that sort of stuff, they can control and manipulate things — baits and genetic controls and whatever else. We really have to be looking at that. We are getting quite clever at it.

The CHAIR — There are a few others who want to ask a few questions.

Mr RICHARDSON — The eradication table that the department of agriculture has put forward to this committee shows that the deer population has moved to a containment and asset-based protection model, so some of the deer population — I single out deer, but I think that is across the board with a range of invasive species — has gotten a long way away from eradication and it is not possible. What are your views then on the strategies there? If it is widespread throughout a particular area and we are not going to be able to get to a point of eradication, then what is the investment beyond protecting the land we have now? What would you propose in terms of solutions beyond that? Can you elaborate a bit further on that?

Mr INGAMELLS — I go down again to research into genetic solutions. It is a bit scary, but it is possible these days. You could develop a virus that will wipe every deer off the planet — that is easy; anyone can do that these days. That is chickenfeed, I gather, for scientists, and not just any species. The challenge is to get something that is humane and has the effect that you want. Purely in my own imagination, you could actually genetically engineer a native plant in a valley that if the deer ate it then they would — or maybe even the smell of it — go somewhere else. There are any number of clever solutions. I am not saying that that is going to happen or work, but I think you have got to give the people that are doing this work the opportunity, the funding and the resources to really come up with clever solutions.

Mr TILLEY — But hang on, Phil, you are talking about the biodiversity of our native fauna and you are talking about putting in vegetation that would steer deer away. I mean, we have introduced the cane toad, and have a look at how that went. I mean, what damage would that have on the biodiversity of our national parks if you are talking about introducing another species?

Mr INGAMELLS — Unlike the cane toad, these things are done carefully with tests and things like that.

Mr TILLEY — Well, the cane toad was done very carefully too.

Mr INGAMELLS — Well, okay.

The CHAIR — Maybe not having an argument — —

Mr INGAMELLS — I am not going to — —

The CHAIR — Let us just get into the questions.

Mr INGAMELLS — I totally agree you have to be careful. But as I say, it has moved a long way since the cane toad. It really has.

Mr RICHARDSON — So would you submit then, Phil, that really the recreational hunting, as a way of managing invasive species, is just tinkering around the edges and it is a moot point?

Mr INGAMELLS — It is absolutely tinkering around the edges. Its effect will only be to perhaps reduce animals in certain areas. It will not fix the problem. I just do not believe it, and I have seen no evidence that it will, even in the areas where they have reduced a lot of numbers. And I think it will have an effect — expanding more into national parks will have an effect — on visitor amenity in parks, absolutely.

Mr RICHARDSON — Because I am interested in the Cardinia Reservoir reference, that is obviously a fenced-in Melbourne Water asset as well. I think that is where the conversation is probably going, with containment and asset protection, how significant that reservoir is for the region. In terms of that containment do you see a place for some of those volunteers that you were referencing for the Yellingbo example and some of the Upper Yarra work that has been done through the Cardinia Hills?

Mr INGAMELLS — Yes.

Mr RICHARDSON — Is it a way that recreational hunters can be involved in that process, and is that an approach that could be investigated or expanded further?

Mr INGAMELLS — Absolutely. At the moment those trials are almost useless because they are only funded as a trial and there is no follow-up stuff, so those populations will re-establish very quickly at the moment. It would be really good to run those trials to see, and I believe that they can be very effective, particularly as you build up the level. I notice with a lot of volunteer programs that when you keep repeating them and you have the same people coming, then the level of supervision decreases. So PV knows who the operators are and where they are going, and the operators know what they are doing, so you can hand over a degree of responsibility to the accredited volunteers. I think that is a good way to go.

What will be interesting to see is just how many people and the extent to which that can be replicated across the state. I mean, what are the limits of the number of properly accredited volunteers who have the time and energy to do that? Again, as has happened with PV's goat programs, they have done that; they have used accredited volunteers, but also to seal the deal, if you like, they have had to go to professional shooters. I think it is a mix of things. Like most things, it is a mix of things.

Mr RICHARDSON — Just finally, and I take Daniel's point about the 70 000 deer that have been removed by recreational hunters — that is the estimate put forward by, I think, the deer association — —

Mr YOUNG — GMA.

Mr RICHARDSON — GMA, is it? Thank you. Given that there is such an abundance of resource on the recreational front, do you see a need to expand further into other areas or regions,— given that we are estimating that the deer population could be north of 1 million now, as we stand today?

Mr INGAMELLS — The figure from the GMA is done by a phone survey, partly operated by the Arthur Rylah Institute at Melbourne and by someone else who I cannot remember. I am not actually questioning it, but it would be helpful to make that figure more robust, I think, and to really look at how that process is done. I am just leaving it there — it is an important survey — to see how effective that is. I would like to see some robust analysis of that. As with a lot of the stuff in land management issues, that would be useful. But again I think expanding hunting today is the wrong focus, and I do really believe that it will affect visitor amenity in our parks. We are certainly getting that. I mean, we have a very large number of sporters out there who are quite worried about it all.

The CHAIR — Maybe we will just leave it at that.

Mr INGAMELLS — Sure.

Mr RICHARDSON — Thanks, Phil.

The CHAIR — Bill has a few questions.

Mr TILLEY — Good morning, Phil. We have not had the opportunity to meet over the years. Just so I understand the evidence that you have been giving the committee today better, do you have a very long association with the VNPA?

Mr INGAMELLS — Fairly long, yes. Not hugely long. Well, in different ways I have quite a long association, yes. But as a staff member it is about 12 years, I think.

Mr TILLEY — Twelve years, okay. So going back around the 1980s?

Mr INGAMELLS — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — So you have been around for quite a while.

Mr INGAMELLS — In the 1980s I worked for the department in a community education role.

Mr TILLEY — Which department?

Mr INGAMELLS — Between 1985 and 1995 I worked for what used to be the National Parks Service, then it was amalgamated into Conservation, Forests and Lands and then it became various other names. My role was to develop community education programs across the state.

Mr TILLEY — So you have an ongoing relationship with a number of statutory bodies within the organisations and those things.

Mr INGAMELLS — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — You appreciate that we have taken significant amounts of submissions from various groups. So with invasive species, and particularly we are talking about a number of animals including deer, dog, fox and cat, and the impact they are having on our Crown estate, when did the VNPA — with so many issues, so discount that side of it — first have a significant interest in the deer population? Just so I know the weight of this evidence that you are giving us.

Mr INGAMELLS — I sense that you are going to the claim by the mountain cattlemen. They told us; we did not know about it before then.

Mr TILLEY — Well, we will eventually get there.

Mr INGAMELLS — The mountain cattlemen certainly did tell us about deer and wanted to know why we were not doing that, but I have to say that the mountain cattlemen were not the only people telling us about deer, including our own members. We were well aware of the deer situation as well as hearing it from the mountain cattlemen. We had been aware for a number of years, and also aware of a number of other issues around the state.

The reason we focused on cattle rather than deer at that time was a very simple one. You can pass legislation to get rid of the cattle, and the cattle go. You can pass legislation to get rid of the deer, and they are still there. So that was the first cab off the rank, and like land management, in campaigning you really have to be a bit strategic. We only had the resources to do that campaign. So that is the reason for that, and I have answered that question any number of times on radio over that issue.

We are a very science-based organisation. We have now had three — four, rather — large nature conservation reviews, the first one back in the 70s; the other three more recently. The last one was just a few years ago.

Mr TILLEY — So you do not have any actual embedded scientists within the organisation, or are they associates?

Mr INGAMELLS — There are scientists variously, some in the organisation. We run citizen science programs. We have a program where we coordinate, all the way down the coast, divers to go around and monitor fish and things like that. We coordinate citizen science programs ourselves. We take the advice of scientists. I have no doubt the cattlemen know a lot about the High Country, but I have had the privilege in my time with the VNPA to talk to geologists, to soil scientists who are working out there, to botanists and ecologists and to people who have measured every single peat bed, first of all from the air, then on ground and then reassessed them 10 years later to look at the change in condition. There are an awful lot of people who provide knowledge to these processes, and we work as best we can with those people.

Mr TILLEY — So it is fair to say with your statement you have just given this committee that the reason for the campaign against the mountain cattlemen was more about politics than what it was about the actual science.

Mr INGAMELLS — No, it was — —

The CHAIR — That is completely outside of the terms of reference.

Mr TILLEY — It is not, because I am getting to the deer, the dog and everything else we are talking about.

Mr INGAMELLS — If you do not mind I would like to answer — I agree, it is probably slightly peripheral. No, it was not about politics. It was about the efficacy of the ease of getting rid of that particular problem. The evidence — and I am very happy to spend any amount of time with you outside of this to go through it — is over 100 years of scientific reports, every single one of them pointing out the damage from cattle. The cattle were taken out of Kosciusko National Park so that the Snowy River scheme could run without silted waterways. That was why they came out of Kosciusko National Park.

Mr TILLEY — We also put a massive, man-made piece of infrastructure through there as well.

Mr INGAMELLS — I am really happy to sit down with you. Absolutely; I would love to.

Mr TILLEY — Yes. You referenced the Wonnangatta in recent terms. I spend a lot of time in our national parks, Phil, as you do, and a lot of your members are the same. But in the Wonnangatta now, if you have a look at the images that you showed to the committee of wallowing and deer damage and everything, I mean, have you ever been able to substantiate or take any images of any cattle wallowing or causing the damage? When was the last time you were in the Wonnangatta?

Mr INGAMELLS — It was about two years ago.

Mr TILLEY — Two years ago. All right, fair enough. Well my visit is more recent — this year. You are looking at black wattle; you are looking at all the waterways choked up. You see significant damage, more damage than cattle ever caused to that region, a great part of Victoria.

The CHAIR — I am sorry. We have not got much time. Can we really just talk about current impacts?

Mr TILLEY — All right, let us talk about dogs. We have got dogs, Phil. What is your understanding of dogs in our parks?

Mr INGAMELLS — It is a real problem. It is caught up with the — —

Mr TILLEY — All right, let me narrow it down.

Mr RICHARDSON — Let him answer. Give him a go.

Mr TILLEY — Have you got any evidence whatsoever of any alpine dingoes in any of our public estate?

Mr INGAMELLS — I do not have evidence. There are people that believe there are dingoes there, and I would refer you to those people to answer that question better than I can.

Mr TILLEY — That is why I am getting to the studies. We have had studies conducted, significant amounts of scientific studies, and there are no alpine dingoes. In fact for the nearest purebred alpine dingo, you have to go to Steve Irwin's zoo in Queensland. I am trying to get hard evidence so that this committee can make recommendations and findings to the government without the activism, the politics and just personal views. I am trying to elicit — —

Mr INGAMELLS — We have never made claims of protecting purebred dingoes in the Alpine National Park, so that is not an issue that we have — —

Mr TILLEY — Well, it is differentiating what is currently there, whether it is a wild dog or whether it is actually a dingo.

Mr INGAMELLS — Well, there is a lot of crossbreeding, as I understand it.

Mr TILLEY — All right, obviously the Chair wants to close me down, but anyway — —

Mr INGAMELLS — If I might quickly draw it back, in relation to Wonnangatta, absolutely there is a need for pest plant and animal management at Wonnangatta. Absolutely the funding should be there. In relation to the mountain cattlemen, Graeme Stoney was complaining that we were not doing anything

about it. He was in Parliament. He was in a position to advocate for a really good budget to manage pest plants and animals.

Mr RAMSAY — I think we do agree on that, don't we? All the testimony says that there is not enough money in Parks Victoria to manage weeds.

Mr TILLEY — We can agree on that. That is a fact; that is a statement of fact.

The CHAIR — On that note of agreement, perhaps we can — —

Mr YOUNG — Chair, if I may, I just have two more quick questions.

The CHAIR — Could we make them brief?

Mr YOUNG — I will make them quick. It is just on the use of your word 'evidence', which you have used a dozen or so times today, and it is great because I love it. One part of your submission here is that

... many amateurs are new to the game (some very young), and incapable of accurately targeting animals.

What is your evidence to support that?

Mr INGAMELLS — Well, the person that shot at me missed.

Mr YOUNG — Did he hit the animal he was targeting at?

Mr INGAMELLS — He was targeting me.

Mr YOUNG — I am tipping that he was not trying to shoot at you.

Mr TILLEY — You should have made a complaint to the police on attempted murder.

Mr INGAMELLS — Well, I have been an amateur in my years, trying to shoot rabbits, and I missed.

Mr YOUNG — I am glad that you brought up the incident that you feel was so important that you did not report to police. We are going back to the issue of safety and — —

Mr INGAMELLS — I object to that. I am happy to take that on oath, and I have got witnesses.

Mr YOUNG — That is great, because I am going to absolutely object to something you said earlier. We have had the discussion about safety with several witnesses, and no-one can come up with any sort of significant evidence to say that there is a big safety risk. You have obviously done a bit of research. You have come up with the name of one person who was allegedly shot — I am going to have to do a fact check on that because I am not sure of it — in 1999. For you to sit there and say to us, after banging on about evidence for the last hour or so, that a bloke by the name of Warren — was it? — has disappeared in the national park, and to suggest that it was hunters by alluding to the fact that hunters were near it and that they may be responsible for his death or disappearance or whatever, I think is absolutely disgraceful.

Mr INGAMELLS — I was simply referring — if you want evidence — to newspaper reports that made those things and the family of the person who was missing.

Mr YOUNG — You have suggested here that this happened and hunters were involved.

Mr INGAMELLS — No, I did not say they were involved; I said they were — —

Mr YOUNG — And your words were 'in the area'.

Mr INGAMELLS — Yes.

Mr YOUNG — And your reasoning for bringing that up is?

The CHAIR — I think these are all questions about community safety, that people have a legitimate right to ask about and make comment about — —

Mr YOUNG — Absolutely. And public safety is a big part of this inquiry that we have had, but to come in and talk about evidence and then to suggest that hunters may be responsible for someone disappearing without any evidence — —

Mr INGAMELLS — No, excuse me, what I was simply doing was correcting what I have read in some submissions, that no-one had ever been killed. Gary Paterson, aged 20, was killed when walking his dog in the Yarra State Forest at Warburton East in February 1999, and there was a coroner's inquest to that effect.

Mr YOUNG — And I will fact check that one, and I am not talking about that one, but the other incident you mentioned.

The CHAIR — I think we are sort of going around in circles now. I think we have exhausted our questions, and you have answered those questions, so thank you.

Mr INGAMELLS — Thank you. I am very happy to address any other questions.

Committee adjourned.