

Inquiry into Game and Feral Animal Legislation Amendment (Conservation Hunting) Bill 2025

Hearing Date: 8 August 2025

Responses to supplementary questions from members – Question 1.

Dr Tony Buckmaster, Principal RD&E Manager, Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (Retired)

1. Are you able to examples of where we have been successful in reducing the impact or numbers of invasive species in NSW. What were the key factors contributing to that success? What role did recreational hunters play in that success.

There are many examples of successful invasive species programs in NSW across a range of invasive species. Many wild dog management groups have been very effective at reducing the impacts of wild dogs on stock across NSW.

Two examples of this are

a) Brindabella wild dog management program

This program utilised a nil-tenure approach where all land managers (both public and private) contributed to both developing and implementing the management plan. The group organised and ran a regular 1080 ground baiting program in identified ingress points for wild dogs as well as trialling guardian animal as a supplementary method. Where necessary, the local trapper was called in to trap wild dogs that entered the production lands under the plan.

b) Wongwibinda wild dog management program

This program, with the assistance of the North Eastern NSW Wild Dog Coordinator, developed and implemented a wild dog management plan where 1080 baits were laid via aerial baiting. Baiting was across all land tenures of participating land managers (both private and public).

The key factors to success in both of these were the use of a cohesive and collaborative group of land managers that were following a best practice approach, utilising effective management techniques and having a defined strategic pest management plan that specified what each land manager was going to undertake and contribute as part of the management group. Applying the management techniques in a uniform, consistent and repetitive manner allowed both of these management plans to effectively reduce stock losses.

Recreational hunting played no role in the success of these plans. To my knowledge there are no successful wild dog management programs that utilise ad hoc recreational hunting as part of their control techniques.

There are also a number of successful fox management programs that are reducing the impact of foxes and allowing native fauna to recover. An example of this is

c) Shoalhaven Fox Control Program

This program also uses a coordinated nil-tenure approach to manage foxes over a large portion of the Shoalhaven area. Public and private land managers are involved in the program with the majority of the management undertaken through targeted 1080 baiting and trapping. Shooting is also used as a management technique and it is undertaken as part of the program by either the land managers themselves on their own land or by professional shooters.

Recreational hunting has not contributed to the success of this program. I am unaware of any fox management programs where ad hoc recreational hunting has contributed to the success of the program either through reducing fox impacts or significantly reducing fox numbers.

Programs for larger invasive animals such as feral pigs and deer are less common however there are two of note.

d) The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Supplementary pest control program.

This was a program utilising volunteer hunters from the NSW Sporting Shooters Association of Australia to supplement the normal control undertaken by NPWS in the trial reserves. Volunteer hunters are used as ground shooters as part of a strategic management plan and strict safety and animal welfare guidelines are applied to their participation.

The initial 3 year trial of the program was reviewed by the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) and in that review it was indicated that appropriately trained and capable volunteer ground shooting has the potential to be an effective supplementary pest control technique if used as part of an integrated pest management program under controlled conditions.

Recreational hunting was not utilised as part of this program and does not fit the NRC requirements of a) being part of an integrated pest management program, or b) being under controlled conditions.

e) Foot and Mouth Disease cloven-hoofed vertebrate pest management project run in 2022-23 by the NSW Local Land Services.

This project was undertaken as part of the NSW FMD preparedness program. The program was run across all NSW LLS regions, covering over 11 million Ha of land and involved 138 coordinated programs and utilised a combination of shooting (predominantly aerial) and ground baiting.

During the program over 93,000 cloven hoofed pest animals, including feral pigs and deer were culled in an intensive program across multiple land tenures showing that intensive strategic and coordinated management can rapidly reduce invasive pest animals.

Recreational hunting did not contribute to this program.

In all of the programs mentioned, one of the key factors of success is the development and implementation of a strategic integrated pest management plan that governs the management techniques that are used, when they are used, and to what extent they are used. This does not occur with ad-hoc recreational hunting whether used as a primary method of invasive species management or even as a supplementary method of management.

To my knowledge there are no successful invasive pest management programs in NSW that have used ad hoc recreational hunting as the primary methods of management.

Of note is a study to determine whether recreational hunting can reduce feral fallow deer numbers that was undertaken in 2020 – 2023. While this study was in Tasmania and not NSW, it was undertaken by researchers from NSW DPIRD, University of Tasmania, Tasmanian Land Conservancy and La Trobe University (it is available from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/emr.70001>).

Researchers found that recreational hunting was not able to reduce the deer density on the study site as they were unable to harvest enough deer to bring down the density of the population. While the

recreational hunters were able to harvest between 21% and 26% of the deer population annually, this was not sufficient to reduce the deer density as the deer were able to replace these losses through natural breeding.

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Responses to supplementary questions from members – Question 2.

Dr Tony Buckmaster, Principal RD&E Manager, Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (Retired)

2. Can you give an estimate of how many feral pigs there are in NSW?

I apologise to the member of the committee as I am unable to answer this question. There are no reliable or accurate estimates of the current number of feral pigs in NSW. Any figure that could be given would be simply a guess rather than an accurate assessment of the population abundance. The abundance of feral pigs varies between years with generally a higher abundance in extended wet periods and a lower abundance during prolonged drought times.

The last correctly assessed population of feral pigs was undertaken by University of Canberra researcher, Professor Jim Hone, who indicated that at a national level the average abundance of feral pigs in Australia between 2000 and 2009 was between 2.4 and 4 million (see <https://www.publish.csiro.au/zo/zo20077>) however I recognise that this does not answer the Committee's specific question.