

Brian Boyle's Response to Questions on Notice from The Hon. Ms Sue Higginson MLC

at the STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT INQUIRY INTO THE GAME AND FERAL ANIMAL LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (CONSERVATION HUNTING) BILL 2025, at Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney on Friday 8 August 2025

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Whilst you were doing that, did you also engage with the office of the Minister for Agriculture and the office of the Minister for the Environment and their staff?

BRIAN BOYLE: I accompanied Robert at whatever meetings he needed to do with the various people in government, yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Could you tell me when those meetings were, what they were and how many of them there were, please?

BRIAN BOYLE: No, not off the top of my head.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Would you be able to take that on notice and provide it to the committee?

BRIAN BOYLE: I could try and take it on notice.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You'd have diary entries and all of that?

BRIAN BOYLE: Yes, I can look at emails.

STATE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Response to the Highlighted Questions from The Hon. Mrs Higginson MLC to Brian Boyle

I thank The Hon. Ms Higginson MLC for her question and the opportunity to reply and further inform her and other members of the Inquiry Committee on these important and forward-looking amendments to the *Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002*.

I have reviewed my emails and the diaries I have kept for the past almost three years since commencing work in The Hon. Robert Borsak MLC's office in the Legislative Council of NSW. The information given below is based on emails, diary entries and appointments in my Outlook Calendar, plus my recollections, noting that I am not required to, and do not keep detailed contemporaneous notes for meetings held.

Since November 2023 when I first started work in his office, I have observed Mr Borsak tirelessly engaging with various Ministers and MLCs in the Legislative Council about the need for broad-scale, ongoing conservation hunting to be seriously considered as an additional tool in pest and invasive animal control in New South Wales. This has been especially relevant in light of the growing feral pig problem faced by New South Wales and the comparatively small number of pigs removed by expensive government and LLS aerial shooting programs in the past two years.

As Mr Ben Russell, the Associate Director of the Natural Resources Commission, stated in his responses to questions in the Inquiry on Friday 8 August 2025: **"... as I've just said, no, we're not going to get to a point where we're mopping up the last pigs. We're not going to remove pigs from New South Wales."** This is a blunt but necessary acknowledgement of the scale of the issue, and the reason why the addition of conservation hunting is so vital to feral, pest and invasive species management in New South Wales.

Mr Borsak, in his dealings with Ministers and other MLCs, has been very effective in communicating the recurring frustration expressed most strongly by farmers he and The

Hon. Mark Banasiak MLC have met with. They have consistently raised the wasted effort and resources being directed to pest control in some regions while producers in western areas were urgently calling for help to control feral pigs. When the numbers taken by helicopters – about 150,000 last year – are compared with those taken by recreational hunters (1.69 million pigs alone on private land last year, plus hundreds of thousands of goats, deer, foxes, wild dogs and feral cats), as well as those shot by farmers and their employees, the disparity is stark and undeniable.

My recollection of the concerns raised by the Ministers when I have been present have been:

- Reducing pest animal numbers on declared public lands and enabling conservation hunters to assist farmers and landholders on private land where they are invited.
- Ensuring that compliance and law enforcement remain firmly and independently under the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), not the proposed Authority.
- Ensuring that the proposed Conservation Hunting Authority (CHA) is an advisory, advocacy and educational body only, not a regulator or law enforcer.

Mr Borsak has provided comfort and clarity to Ministers by confirming that:

- Compliance and enforcement will stay in DPIRD, independent of the CHA.

The CHA will have no regulation-making ability and no law enforcement role. Its purpose is to advise the Minister, guide the Authority on research and hunter education, and foster stronger working relationships with groups such as NSW Farmers (who support the Bill) and Local Land Services (LLS), so that conservation hunting can be fully integrated into broader pest animal management strategies.

Conservation hunting has always been presented as part of an overall solution, never as a silver bullet. The repeated misrepresentation by the Greens Political Party and their propaganda wing, the Invasive Species Council, that hunting is promoted as a replacement for other pest control methods is simply untrue.

- The Ministers were also ware of the need for proper governance.

Comfort was given by Mr Borsak to the Ministers by the Conservation Hunting Authority continuing to operate within the governance frameworks and accountability standards of DPIRD, ensuring proper oversight, continuity, and transparency. This addresses legitimate community concerns – though, as I have noted before, some ideologically-based groups such as the Animal Justice Party, the Greens Political Party, and their propaganda and advocacy wing, the Invasive Species Council (ISC), will never be satisfied, regardless of the safeguards built in.

It is worth being very clear about the ISC here. The current ISC CEO, Mr Gough, (even though he won't admit it on radio interviews or in the Inquiry) is a former Greens staffer. The former ISC CEO, Mr Andy Cox, was in fact a notable guest of Greens Party MLC the Hon. Ms Sue Higginson in the Legislative Council during the Conservation Hunting Bill debate. The ISC has its registered address in Victoria in an office building shared by two Victorian Greens Political Party MPs as well as a number of very green organisations. Former Tasmanian Greens MP and Federal Greens Senator Ms Christine Milne is an Ambassador for the ISC. This is the reality: **the ISC is not an "independent body"**, but rather an advocacy and propaganda arm of the Greens Political Party, promoting their ideological

agenda under the guise of “independent advice.” I thank The Hon. Sue Higginson for the opportunity to bring this to the attention of the Committee Inquiry members here.

- For both the Minister for Primary Industries and the Minister for the Environment, the main focus has been on safely increasing feral, invasive and pest animal removal rates across the State – on both public and private land – while ensuring sound governance.

The safety record of licensed conservation hunting on declared public lands under the Act has been exceptional, and this cannot be overstated. Licensed operations have also successfully occurred in high-use, risk-averse areas such as a working mine in Wollongong and even the grounds of the University of Wollongong during semesters, without students or staff even being aware. This demonstrates that conservation hunting can be carried out safely and effectively when properly managed.

On the point of perspective, I do understand where The Hon. Ms Sue Higginson MLC is coming from. As a former legal professional, her training and background are grounded in the courtroom – in adversarial practice, where defending criminals, violent offenders, drug dealers, or worse, can mean putting aside personal morality to uphold the duty of legal representation (and at the end of the week – earn a living for themselves and their families). In that environment, suspicion of motive and an instinct to assume hidden deals or bad faith are possibly professional reflexes. But politics, land management, and conservation are not the same as the adversarial legal system. On this issue, suspicion is misplaced. The Bill and the proposal for a Conservation Hunting Authority have been developed over the past 2 ½ years in good faith, and with farmers, land managers, and communities in mind – not through “backroom deals,” as the Greens Political Party, Animal Justice Party and the ISC have tried to suggest. I can't help but ponder, maybe this reflects their lived experience in how they get things done themselves as well?

Over the period leading up to the introduction of the Bill into the Legislative Council, my Microsoft Outlook Diary records confirm meetings with Ministers on 15/2/2024, 30/2/2024, 30/6/2024, 22/10/2024, 23/10/2024, 6/11/2024, and 30/4/2025. There may have been other incidental meetings during sitting weeks, when opportunities arose for quick discussions, and I have covered the issues relating to The Hon. Ms Higginson's question in the paragraphs above.

Finally, for the benefit of The Hon. Sue Higginson MLC and the Hon. Ms Emma Hurst MLC, it should be noted that support for the Bill and for conservation hunting has come from a diverse range of stakeholders. Significantly, the CEO of the Sydney Metro Aboriginal Land Council expressed strong support for the Bill, as well as for hunting both on his Local Aboriginal Land Council lands and on his traditional lands on the North Coast. This is an important endorsement, highlighting that conservation hunting is recognised across cultural, regional, and stakeholder groups as a legitimate and beneficial tool in land and pest management.

Before finishing I also wish to address the repeated questions raised by a number of Committee members, including those from the Honourable Greens member that suggest the majority of hunters are motivated primarily by trophies. This is simply not supported by the available research and published data in Australia.

A peer-reviewed national survey conducted by the University of Queensland of more than 7,700 hunters clearly shows that the leading motivations are pest control (87%), recreation (85%), meat harvesting for self-sufficiency (80%), conservation (65%), and game management (40%). In contrast, only 35% selected trophies as a motivation (McLeod et al., Wildlife Research, 2019).

When broken down to New South Wales respondents (approximately 1,900 hunters), the results are almost identical: pest control (87%), recreation (84%), meat (76%), conservation (65%), and game management (36%). Again, trophy hunting motivation was much lower at only 37%, making it a minority driver compared to food, land management and conservation values (McLeod et al., 2019 – state tables).

This aligns with further findings from the Federal Government–commissioned report on the Economic and Social Impacts of Recreational Hunting and Shooting in Australia (RMCG, 2019), which highlights that the overwhelming majority of participants value time outdoors, connection with nature, relaxation, and skill development — motivations that are entirely inconsistent with the claim that hunters are primarily trophy-driven.

The evidence therefore demonstrates beyond doubt that the perception of trophy hunting as the dominant motivation is a myth. The majority of Australian and NSW hunters participate for reasons of self-sufficiency, environmental stewardship, pest management and recreation.

I thank The Hon. Ms Higginson MLC again for her question, and I hope this response has clarified matters, corrected misinformation, and provided assurance that conservation hunting is a responsible, effective, and necessary addition to New South Wales' pest animal management strategy.

And the Supplementary Question from Members emailed to me:

- (1) What information or criteria was provided to Crown Lands to produce the list of designated lands contained in Schedule 3 of the bill?

Response:

During the course of my work on this Bill for Mr. Borsak, over the past 2 ½ years, I have not had any communication with the Crown Lands Department regarding the Bill, nor am I aware of any meeting that Mr. Borsak may have had with that Department.

The only communication with the Crown Lands Minister's office in relation to this matter concerned Mr Borsak's proposal that the Minister consider that some Crown Lands areas be reopened to permitted hunting by licensed hunters under the *Game and Feral Animal Control Act*. This proposal was put forward with the objective of assisting in the management and control of feral and pest animals on remote and semi-remote Crown Lands, as well as on those areas that had previously been declared and opened under the Act.

It was further suggested that consideration be given to utilising the risk assessment framework developed by the Forestry Corporation of NSW, given the thoroughness of that process between 2004 and 2006 when State forest areas were declared, and in light of the fact that hunting under the Act has since been implemented both safely and successfully.

It is my observation that the Honourable Mr Borsak was very effective in communicating to the Crown Lands Minister and his staff that the Bill reflects long-standing and evidence-based approaches including:

- **Proven safety record:** Hunting under the Act has now been occurring on declared public lands for nearly 20 years across 2 million hectares without a single shooting incident, (while in the same period there have been over 115 deaths from other recreational activities in National Parks).
- **Compliance framework:** Compliance and enforcement responsibilities remain within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), ensuring strong governance and continuation of the high conservation and safety standards already in place. The Crown Lands Department will provide any conditions for licensed permitted hunting on the crown lands it manages
- **Cultural recognition:** The right to hunt recognises that hunting is an important cultural tradition for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in NSW. Importantly, the Bill also requires that public land managers consider hunting when developing management plans, but explicitly states that if they choose not to, their management plans are not negated.
- **Economic contribution:** Hunting is now the fourth-largest primary industry in NSW, contributing around \$500 million annually and supporting over 4,000 jobs, particularly in regional communities. When combined with fishing, these activities contribute an estimated \$2.3 billion per year to the NSW economy.
- **Efficiency of outcomes:** Conservation hunters already make a massive (unrecognised) contribution to pest management in New South Wales. In the last year alone, recreational hunters removed nearly 1.69 million feral pigs, several

hundred thousand deer, goats, rabbits, foxes, and feral cats on private land, plus a further 14,000 animals on declared public lands. By contrast, expensive government programs, which cost around \$15 million in a single year (primarily helicopter shooting), removed fewer than 150,000 animals.

- **Balanced management approach:** The proposed Conservation Hunting Authority is not a regulatory or enforcement body. Its role is in advocacy education research and advisory — to support the Minister with expert advice, research, hunter education, and to strengthen partnerships with stakeholders such as NSW Farmers and Local Land Services. ***Conservation hunting has always been presented as part of an integrated suite of measures, never as a replacement for other pest control tools such as aerial shooting or baiting.***
- **Support from stakeholders:** The Bill enjoys wide-ranging support, including from Aboriginal leaders such as the CEO of the Sydney Metro Local Aboriginal Land Council, who also supports hunting on his LALC lands and traditional lands on the North Coast, recognising its cultural and land management importance.

By relying on a framework already proven in State Forests and integrating conservation hunting into broader pest management strategies, the Bill aims to deliver practical, humane, and cost-effective results for the Crown Lands Department, other land managers and landholders, and the environment alike.

I thank the Hon. Member for this supplementary question and the chance to further inform the Inquiry Committee on these matters.