

## RSPCA Australia Submission

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# Legislative Council Parliamentary Inquiry Game and Feral Animal Legislation Amendment (Conservation Hunting) Bill 2025

4 August 2025

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The RSPCA is an independent, community-based charity dedicated to advancing animal welfare for the humane treatment of animals. Guided by our vision that all animals have a good life, we work tirelessly to prevent cruelty by actively promoting the care and protection of animals Australia-wide.

Our activities span all states and territories and include operating animal rehoming shelters, investigating and prosecuting animal cruelty complaints and educating the community on responsible pet ownership. Informed by contemporary values and the latest scientific knowledge, we work with governments and industries to address critical animal welfare issues.

This submission reflects our ongoing commitment to the development of policies and practices that uphold the welfare of animals across all sectors. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry, with the objective of working collaboratively towards meaningful progress in animal welfare.

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# Summary

The *Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002 (NSW)* (the Act) is a complex statutory environment, and it is in this context that the proposed Game and Feral Animal Legislation Amendment (Conservation Hunting) Bill 2025 attempts to make significant amendment to the way recreational hunting has been conducted in NSW for at least two decades. It does this linguistically by imposing what appears to be an artificial conservation lens over hunting activities.

The Bill creates a statutory right to hunt (unknown to NSW law previously), a Ministerial portfolio and presumably an associated department, disbands and replaces a Statutory Authority, makes approximately 55,000 hectares of Crown land available for hunting, and creates a statutorily enshrined “genuine reason” for people engaged in hunting to purchase, possess and use prohibited weapons (gun silencers).

Consequently, the RSPCA considers that the Bill should not be adopted for the following reasons:

- a) It poses significant risks to public safety and animal welfare and significantly weakens safeguards necessary to regulate hunting in NSW.
- b) By creating a statutory right to hunt, replacing restricted licences, expanding access to hunt on Crown land, and broadening the use of equipment such as suppressors, it poses serious risks to public safety and animal welfare.
- c) By replacing restricted licences and turning them into conservation licences which are undefined and do not require mandatory training, it is likely to increase the risk of animal suffering through incomplete or ineffective kills and increases the likelihood of target misidentification, leading to the harm or death of non-target and endangered species.
- d) It replaces one statutory authority – the NSW Game and Pest Management Advisory Board, with another, more expensive statutory authority – the NSW Conservation Hunting Authority (CHA), the membership of which is very problematic, dominated as it is by hunting interests, and without adequate representation from conservation ecology, pest animal management, veterinary and animal welfare experts or firearms and public safety expertise. This structure risks undermining evidence-based pest management.
- e) The amendments promote recreational hunting as a form of pest control, despite clear evidence that it is not effective at delivering meaningful pest control outcomes. Recreational hunting is neither a safe nor effective method of pest control and should not be treated as such.

If the Committee, having considered this Bill, considers that changes to the Act are required, then the only safe course involves a thorough and peer-reviewed assessment of whether current access to public and private land meets the needs of recreational hunters, and determining which mechanisms can be supported to uphold the principles of safety, evidence-based pest management, animal welfare, and conservation.

# Introduction

The RSPCA does not support the Game and Feral Animal Legislation Amendment (Conservation Hunting) Bill 2025. However, whilst the RSPCA opposes recreational hunting as a policy position, the RSPCA opposition to this Bill is for reasons over and above the issues we take with recreational hunting as an activity. The Bill unacceptably weakens restrictions around hunting and risks significant animal welfare and personal safety compromise.

For the purposes of this submission, we adopt the *Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002 (NSW)* (the Act) definition of hunt, meaning to pursue, trail, stalk or drive out an animal, or to capture or kill an animal, by use of a firearm, bow, animal or other hunting device<sup>1</sup>. The RSPCA opposes recreational hunting due to the unacceptable risk of causing severe pain and suffering<sup>2</sup>.

With respect to the process of public consultation and parliamentary inquiry, the RSPCA comments that this is a complex statutory environment. The Bill was introduced on 27 May 2025, it was referred to Committee for inquiry and report on 24 June 2025, with submissions due 5 weeks later.

At the time of writing, although submissions have not closed, 50 submissions have been published on the Committee landing page and hearing dates timetabled for four days after submissions close on 8 and 11 August 2025. This Bill needs more consultation, 11 amendments have been tabled, and in conjunction with the substantive Act, the draft Bill, the amendments tabled, and what will likely be many more than 50 submissions, more time is required. Stakeholder consultation fatigue is well known in the literature, particularly in the animal welfare context<sup>3</sup>. It must be the case that other stakeholders are in similar situations with this submission due by midnight on 4 August 2025.

## Summary of amendments

Summary of amendment	Current provision	Comments
<b>(Schedule 1[1]): Recognition of hunting in objects</b>		
Inserts an object before the current objects which recognises hunting on public and private land as an activity supporting conservation, cultural practices, and environmental connection with the natural environment.	Objects currently relate to providing for effective management of introduced game animals and promoting responsible hunting of game animals on public and private land and of certain pest animals on public land.	Amending the objects in this way gives primacy to hunting as an object, which the original drafting of this Act does not support.

<sup>1</sup> Section 4 *Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002 (NSW)*.

<sup>2</sup> RSPCA Australia Information Paper, Recreational hunting and animal welfare, December 2017, (available online, accessed 28.07.2025) <<https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Recreational-hunting-RSPCA-Information-Paper-Dec-2017.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> Ross T. Shackleton et al., (2019) "Stakeholder engagement in the study and management of invasive alien species", *Journal of Environmental Management*, 229: 88-101.

<b>(Schedule 1[2] - [7]): Definitions</b>		
Conservation Hunting Authority	n/a	The Bill needs to define more of the terms that are crucial to its interpretation, particularly “conservation hunting”. Where drafting leaves definitional ambiguity such that if a Court is called on to resolve it, without appropriate drafting rectifying this issue, it is likely to cause significant problems.
Minister for Hunting and Fishing	n/a	
Game and Pest Management Advisory Board definition deleted	See Part 2 of Act	The Bill deletes all references and function of the Board to be replaced by the Conservation Hunting Authority.
Deletes the definition of game hunting licence and inserts “conservation hunting” licences	See definitions in s4 and Part 3 of the Act	See comments below (page 7).
Public Land	S4 of the Act	Removes national park estate land from s4(b1) and puts it in s4(e) of the Act
Deletes “or Regional NSW” from the definition of “Regulatory Authority”		Without any indication that DPIRD are inadequately administering this Act, they are removed, in lieu of a new Minister and presumably a new Department.
<b>(Schedule 1[8]: sections 4A - 4C): Statutory “right to hunt”</b>		
Grants a statutory right to hunt on public and private land for cultural reasons, recreation and managing invasive introduced species.	No statutory right to hunt currently exists.	RSPCA opposes creating a statutory right to hunt. See comments below on page 9. There is no definition of any of the terms at s4A(1) (a) to (c).
Obligations of land managers to consider the right to hunt and practicalities in facilitating hunting	n/a	The land manager ‘may’ consult the CHA but doesn’t have to in making a land management decision, but <b>must</b> consider the right to hunt and practicalities. If land managers of Crown land are to permit hunting, then other users must be consulted, with sufficient detail, and time to object, and the CHA should also be consulted.

<b>(Schedule 1[10], sections 7 - 9): Establishment of Conservation Hunting Authority</b>		
Abolishes the Game and Pest Management Advisory Board (the Board) and establishes an 8-member Conservation Hunting Authority (CHA).	n/a	The constitution of the Authority does not give sufficient representation to permit a balanced advice. The CHA operates under the same terms as the current Board. What utility is there to effectively replacing one statutory authority with another?
Membership		The Bill describes 8 members, 4 of which are nominated by prescribed hunting organisations, and the person nominated by the Secretary does not have voting rights. Accordingly, the prescribed hunting organisation component will always hold a majority.
Functions	See section 9 for the current Board functions	There are functions which might sensibly be added to the current s9(1) functions of the Board. However, deleting the current s9(1)(c) function - providing advice on request to the Minister on priorities for expenditure on research from the Game and Pest Management Trust Fund, is not reflected in the new draft and the research priorities are unashamedly one sided in promoting hunting, whether the research and literature supports it, or not.
<b>(Schedule 1[4], [11] - [13]): Licence renaming</b>		
Renames Restricted Game Hunting Licences to Conservation Hunting Licences and updates references throughout the Act accordingly.	Licence classes include Restricted Game Hunting Licences and General Game Hunting Licences; no "conservation" designation.	There is no definition of "conservation hunting" in the Act, explanatory note or Second Reading Speech. Given the Bill purports to turn all restricted game licences into conservation hunting licences this oversight makes further analysis difficult.
Classes of game hunting licences		
Restricted licences become Conservation hunting licences		

<b>(Schedule 1 [17]): Amendments to the Game and Pest Management Trust Fund</b>		
<b>(Schedule 1[25]): Expanded licence species</b>		
Adds camels to the list of regulated game species requiring a licence to hunt on public land.	Camels are not currently listed under current licence requirements.	There is no explanation in the extrinsic material, explanatory memoranda, second reading speech or the legislation review committee entry as to the reason for adding camels to Schedule 3, part 2 - non-indigenous animals (licence required to hunt on public land only) list. There is no assessment as to the safety or efficacy of hunting animals, nor is there a conservation rationale that explains this amendment. A risk assessment and a bio-diversity assessment should take place before animals are added to Schedule 3.
<b>(Schedule 1[27]): Transitional arrangements</b>		
Dissolves the existing Advisory Board and automatically converts existing restricted licences to conservation hunting licences upon commencement of the Act.		See comments above (pages 6 and 7), and below (page 13).
<b>(Schedule 3, Part 9A): Crown land mechanisms</b>		
Enables designation of Crown land for hunting (excluding national parks) via Ministerial approval and consultation with CHA.	No statutory process exists for designating Crown land for hunting; public land access currently on a case-by-case and controlled by DPIRD.	The RSPCA agrees with the comments of the Legislation Review Committee. The mechanism for designation of Crown land for hunting must be legislated and mechanisms for notifying of an intention to designate crown land, review, consultation and appeal processes must be enshrined.
Plans of management		See above, plans are insufficient
<b>(Schedule 4.2): Weapon authorisation</b>		
Amends the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998 to permit use of prohibited weapons like suppressors if used for duly licensed conservation hunting activities.	Prohibited weapons like suppressors are not permitted except via narrow exemptions under firearms laws.	This amendment is not supported, it is unnecessary to permit greater use of Crown lands for hunting, and technological developments have many in-ear options for hearing protection.



# Comments

## Recognition of hunting as an object of the Act

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Inserting an object which requires interpretation of the legislation to prioritise a hunting purpose is inappropriate in this legislation. The amendment inserts the recognition of hunting to encourage conservation, preserve culture and encourage engagement with the natural environment. It is inappropriate to prioritise hunting as the overlay for interpreting the current statutory objectives and seeks to rewrite the original intentions of the Act.

Moreover, without additional definition, the amendment to the objects inserts ambiguity. We will address additional definitional issues below. If there is a desire to insert an object which speaks to preserving culture, it is essential that the current object (at ii) be amended to clarify that it speaks to Indigenous culture and connections between Country and Traditional Owners.

## Creating a statutory “right to hunt”

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Granting a statutory right to hunt on public and private land for cultural, recreational, and pest control reasons is unnecessary. NSW (indeed Australia and most of the States and Territories) is historically slow to grant rights at law. For example, only Victoria, Queensland and the ACT have specific human rights legislation. It is, therefore, hard to overstate how extraordinary this attempt at instilling a statutory right to hunt is. The RSPCA does not support creating a right to hunt.

The Legislation Review Committee lists examples of rights it considers in reviewing legislation on page 6, it includes freedoms – expression, and free speech (more regularly called the limited and implied right of political communication) freedoms of religious belief and freedom of contract. The rights it lists are rights to personal and real property and personal physical integrity. In that context, and taking into account other similar legislation in NSW, attempting to confer a right to hunt on a small subset of the NSW population, which will necessarily impinge on the freedoms others enjoy (recreational use of Crown land for non-hunting purposes for example), is extraordinary and not accepted.

## Licensing

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Hunting involves firearms, lethal force, and often takes place in remote or shared environments. These inherent risks demand careful oversight. Licensing ensures minimum safety standards, weapons handling proficiency, and accountability<sup>4</sup>. Section 17 of the Act creates exemptions from the requirement to have a game hunting licence, including for example, hunting an animal listed in part 2 Schedule 3 on private land or under the authority of an owner occupier. There is an argument that all hunting should be regulated via competency-based assessment, particularly having regard to the regulatory impost associated licensing in other hazardous contexts (e.g., driving, boating, firearm use) all of which require competency based legal permits. Recent events illustrate these risks. In just the past three months, three individuals have been critically injured during hunting activities in New

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<sup>4</sup> Negin, J., Alpers, P. and Peters, R., 2020. Firearm regulation in Australia: insights from international experience and research.

South Wales<sup>567</sup>. Between 2000 and 2010, hunting-related incidents resulted in at least 25 fatalities in Australia. Recreational hunters are estimated to comprise 1% of the Australian population.

## Ad hoc hunting is not an effective pest control measure

This Bill identifies pest control as a valid justification for hunting. However, recreational hunting is not considered an effective method of pest control<sup>891011121314</sup>. Effective pest management requires coordinated planning, consultation, ecological understanding, defined targets, monitoring, and objectives<sup>15</sup>, none of which are inherent in recreational hunting. Without these principles, hunting can fail to reduce pest populations sustainably<sup>16</sup>, disrupt professional control programs<sup>17</sup> and may lead to the disruption of habitat, suffering or death of non-target and native species, including endangered fauna<sup>1819</sup>.

To be effective and safe, pest management must be carried out as part of a co-ordinated program by qualified pest management officers who possess the expertise and training required to apply best-practice methods. Certified pest management officers are legally obligated to meet specific training

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<sup>5</sup>Theocharous, M., 2025. Man shot during hunting trip in NSW Central Tablelands. 9NEWS (available online, accessed 28.07.2025) <<https://www.9news.com.au/national/oberon-man-shot-during-hunting-trip-in-nsw-central-tablelands/5fbda4a7-c1fc-4878-bac0-5c4a56ad559c#:~:text=By%20Mikala%20Theocharous,Hospital%20in%20a%20critical%20condition>>.

<sup>6</sup>Huang, D., 2025. Nine-year-old boy hospitalised after allegedly being shot during hunting trip in remote NSW. 7NEWS (available online, accessed 28.07.2025) <<https://7news.com.au/news/nine-year-old-boy-hospitalised-after-allegedly-being-shot-during-hunting-trip-in-remote-nsw-c-19330994>>.

<sup>7</sup>McGrath, N., 2025. Hunter left fighting for life after Good Friday Incident on remote property. Blayney Chronicle (accessed online 28.07.2025) <<https://www.blayneychronicle.com.au/story/8946203/elderly-man-critical-after-easter-hunting-accident/>>.

<sup>8</sup>Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine., 2010. Australian External Cause Deaths While Engaged In Hunting Activities. Game Council of NSW (available online, accessed 28.07.2025) <<https://ssaa.org.au/assets/news-resources/hunting/australian-external-cause-deaths-engaged-hunting-activities.pdf>>.

<sup>9</sup>Finch, N., Murray, P., Hoy, J. and Baxter, G., 2014. Expenditure and motivation of Australian recreational hunters. *Wildlife Research*, 41(1), pp.76-83.

<sup>10</sup>Fairbridge, D, Marks, C., 2005. Evaluation of the 2002/03 Victorian Fox Bounty Trial. Vertebrate Pest Research Unit, Primary Industries Research Victoria, Department of Primary Industries, Frankston.

<sup>11</sup>Australian Government and Tasmanian Government., 2011. Alternatives to 1080 Program, Australian and Tasmanian Government (accessed online 20.07.2025) <<https://nre.tas.gov.au/Documents/1080ReportFINAL.pdf>>.

<sup>12</sup>RSPCA Knowledge base. Is recreational hunting an effective management tool. 2020 (accessed online 20.07.2025) <<https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/is-recreational-hunting-an-effective-form-of-pest-animal-management/>>.

<sup>13</sup>Arroyo, B. and Beja, P., 2002. Impact of hunting management practices on biodiversity. Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. Banchory.

<sup>14</sup>Gortázar, C. and Fernandez-de-Simon, J., 2022. One tool in the box: the role of hunters in mitigating the damages associated to abundant wildlife. *European Journal of Wildlife Research*, 68(3), p.28.

<sup>15</sup>Braysher, M., 2017. Managing Australia's Pest Animals. A guide to strategic planning and effective management. CSIRO Publishing

<sup>16</sup>Arroyo, B. and Beja, P., 2002. Impact of hunting management practices on biodiversity. Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. Banchory.

<sup>17</sup>Bengsen, A.J. and Sparkes, J., 2016. Can recreational hunting contribute to pest mammal control on public land in Australia?. *Mammal Review*, 46(4), pp.297-310.

<sup>18</sup>Hofer, H., Campbell, K.L., East, M.L. and Huish, S.A., 1996. The impact of game meat hunting on target and non-target species in the Serengeti. In *The exploitation of mammal populations* (pp. 117-146). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

<sup>19</sup>Kanstrup, N., Swift, J., Stroud, D.A. and Lewis, M., 2018. Hunting with lead ammunition is not sustainable: European perspectives. *Ambio*, 47(8), pp.846-857.

and competency standards before undertaking such tasks<sup>20</sup>. It is inconsistent for the Bill to assert a pest management objective given that there is substantial evidence that demonstrates that recreational hunting is not recognised as an effective or evidence-based approach to pest management.

### Biosecurity risks posed by hunting

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Hunting poses many serious biosecurity risks including transfer of weeds, insect and animal pests, diseases (including zoonotic disease) through soil, plant and animal material. Maintaining strict biosecurity is of critical importance due to the potentially devastating impacts on agricultural productivity, human health, and conservation and biodiversity. With the threat of current and new diseases, it would be very prudent to restrict hunting rather than expand areas available to hunters. Agricultural production contributes significantly to Australia's economy and some hunting activities/impacts are of particular concern, especially in relation to feral pigs, including transporting and releasing live feral pigs to new areas, leaving left-overs from meals in hunting areas and poor disinfection of boots, clothes and equipment. Ground shooting in general may also pose risks in relation to disease spread including dispersing pigs or making pigs more wary<sup>21</sup>. These are paramount risks given the real threat of African Swine Fever to Australia. In addition, pig hunting using dogs poses human health risks including *Brucella suis*, which has been described as an emerging, zoonotic disease predominantly affecting dogs and humans who engage in pig hunting in Australia and in other countries<sup>22</sup>.

## Abolishing the Game and Pest Management Advisory Board and replacing it with the Conservation Hunting Authority (CHA)

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The RSPCA considers the replacement of one statutory authority with another that so closely resembles it (except for the constitution of the committee) to be unnecessary. The Bill makes provision in Part 2 for the establishment of the CHA, to be comprised of eight members appointed by the Minister responsible for hunting and fishing. Of these, four will be nominated by prescribed hunting organisations. Despite the Authority's title suggesting a focus on conservation, only one member is required to have any expertise in wildlife management. This composition raises serious concerns. By contrast, the current NSW Game and Pest Management Advisory Board (GPMAB) sets a more rigorous standard, requiring its members to have demonstrated expertise in one or more of the following: game and feral animal hunting, pest animal management, wildlife management, veterinary science, or education and community engagement<sup>23</sup>. No such clear, or relevant, criteria exist for CHA members under this amendment.

The heavy representation from hunting organisations, combined with the lack of mandatory conservation expertise among members, makes the name "Conservation Hunting Authority"

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<sup>20</sup> Braysher, M., 2017. Managing Australia's Pest Animals. A guide to strategic planning and effective management. CSIRO Publishing

<sup>21</sup> Choquenot D, McIlroy J and Korn K (1996) *Managing Vertebrate Pests: Feral Pigs*, Bureau of Resource Sciences, AGPS, Canberra. Available online at: <http://www.pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Managing-vertebrate-pests-feral-pigs.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Kneipp CC, Rose AM, Robson J, Malik R et al (2023) *Brucella suis* in three dogs: presentation, diagnosis and clinical management. Australian Veterinary Journal, 101:133-141.

<sup>23</sup> NSW Government, Department of Primary Industries. Game and Pest Management Advisory Board. Position Description and Required Skills and Experience. Sydney.

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misleading and diminishes the Authority's legitimacy as a body equipped to advise on conservation-related matters. It is likely to result in a body that is biased toward hunting interests and lacks balanced input from independent conservation or animal welfare experts. The RSPCA recommends that if the CHA is introduced, the expertise of members should include conservation ecology, pest animal management, veterinary, animal welfare, firearm, public safety and hunting. This would create a more balanced and effective advisory group.

Specific concerns regarding the mandated functions of the CHA include its role in liaising with public sector agencies on land management matters, advising the Minister responsible for game and feral animal management, and liaising with Local Land Services and other relevant bodies on pest animal management. These are significant responsibilities that directly impact land use, environmental outcomes, and animal welfare. The absence of any requirement for CHA members to have expertise and qualifications in land management, pest control, or feral animal management raises serious concerns about the quality and impartiality of the advice and decisions that may result from these functions. The disparity between the functions of the body and its proposed membership, of hunters, undermines the delivery of evidence-based land and pest management practices<sup>24</sup>.

If, despite these concerns, a determination is made to form the CHA, we strongly recommend that:

- The title Conservation Hunting Authority be reconsidered to accurately reflect its composition and purpose.
- Conservation ecology, pest animal management, veterinary, public safety and animal welfare expertise should be required qualifications for a greater proportion of its members.
- The authority's membership is designed to achieve independent, technical advice on high-risk matters and legislative objectives (such as conservation, animal welfare, firearms safety) and that stakeholder consultation with recreational hunters occurs through other avenues.
- The CHA is not given advisory responsibilities in relation to feral animal or pest management, and that such matters remain under the direction of qualified pest management professionals, following established national and state guidelines<sup>25 26 27</sup>.

## Bounties

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Section 9 as drafted in the Bill permits the CHA to make recommendations to the Minister about the expenditure of money from the Game and Pest Management Trust Fund. There has been reporting that such funds may be in the vicinity of \$2 million per year for the payment of bounties. In a radio interview on 27.05.2025, the NSW Premier is reported as having said a system in which shooters were paid a

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<sup>24</sup> Braysher, M., Saunders, G., 2015. Best practice pest animal management. NSW Government. Canberra (accessed online 21.07.2025) <<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/vertebrate-pests/publications/best-practice-pest-animal-mgt>>.

<sup>25</sup> English, A.W. and Chapple, R.S., 2002. A report on the management of feral animals by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service.

<sup>26</sup> Natural Resources Commission, NSW Government. Shared Problem, Shared Solutions – State-wide review of pest management. 2016. Sydney.

<sup>27</sup> DCCEEW., 2022. Threatened Species Strategy Action Plan 2022–2032. Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Canberra.

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small fee for every feral animal they killed would represent “novel ways of reducing the feral goat, the feral pig, the feral cat population, which has really taken over a lot of parks”<sup>28</sup>.

There is no evidence that bounties improve the efficacy of recreational hunting, and do not involve both welfare compromise or fraud<sup>29</sup>. The CSIRO has produced a detailed guide to pest management in Australia, and bounties are not associated with the best practice they promote<sup>30</sup>.

The Bill does not detail in any way how bounties might be paid or administered via the trust, there has been insufficient consultation on the plan, and to date there has only been limited media reporting explaining some of the facts about bounties, how they might operate and what they might cost. The RSPCA recommends an amendment to the section 9 Functions of the CHA to explicitly preclude the paying of bounties for hunting undertaken to claim a fee or reward for each animal killed by someone other than a professional or commercial hunter.

## Abolishing restricted game licences and replacing those licences with conservation hunting licences

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Currently, a restricted (R) hunting licence is only granted after applicants meet specific criteria. These include being a member of an approved hunting organisation and successfully completing an accreditation course<sup>31</sup>. This training covers essential topics such as safe and ethical hunting practices, appropriate hunting methods, and compliance with NSW hunting regulations<sup>32</sup>. In contrast, the proposed conservation hunting licence does not detail any required training or accreditation.

The RSPCA considers that replacing R-licences with conservation hunting licences will result in an increase in hunters who lack the foundational training currently considered necessary for public safety, animal welfare, and regulatory compliance. Without adequate training, hunters may lack the skills necessary to ensure a humane and effective kill. Specifically, they may be unable to achieve accurate headshots, increasing the likelihood of animals being shot in non-lethal areas leading to prolonged suffering and slow deaths<sup>33,34</sup>. A lack of training and knowledge may result in animals being injured and left to suffer without a follow-up shot to complete the kill. Additionally, untrained hunters may not understand the ethical implications of killing lactating females, which results in dependent

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<sup>28</sup> Erin Hee, Region Online News, 29.05.2025, “‘Reckless deal’: NSW Premier’s plan to introduce bounty hunting for ferals divides opinion”, available online, accessed 01.08.2021, <https://regionriverina.com.au/reckless-deal-nsw-premiers-plan-to-introduce-bounty-hunting-for-ferals-divides-opinion/93700/>

<sup>29</sup> Hassall & Associates, 1998, *Economic Evaluation of the Role of Bounties in Vertebrate Pest Management*, Bureau of Resource Sciences <https://pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/06/Economic-evaluation-of-the-role-of-bounties.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Mike Braysher, 2017, *Managing Australia’s Pest Animals: a guide to strategic planning and effective management*, CSIRO Publishing.

<sup>31</sup> NSW Government. Restricted licence (accessed online 21.07.2025) <<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/hunting/hunting-licences/restricted>>.

<sup>32</sup> NSW Government. R-Licence Accreditation Course (accessed online 21.07.2025) <[R-Licence Accreditation Course](#)>.

<sup>33</sup> Whiting, T.L. and Will, D., 2019. Achieving humane outcomes in killing livestock by free bullet I: penetrating brain injury. *The Canadian Veterinary Journal*, 60(5), p.524.

<sup>34</sup> Underwood, W., Anthony, R., Cartner, S., Corey, D., Grandin, T., Greenacre, C., Gwaltney-Brant, S., McCrackin, M.A., Meyer, R. and Miller, D., 2013. AVMA guidelines for the euthanasia of animals: 2013 edition. Schaumburg, IL: American Veterinary Medical Association.

young suffering and dying<sup>35</sup>. Eliminating this training requirement is indefensible, particularly when the regulatory oversight of recreational hunters is limited.

The RSPCA strongly recommends that the legislation clearly defines the conditions of the conservation hunting licence. It is critical to clarify whether the removal of the restricted licence requirements also eliminates these existing training and qualification standards, and if so, how equivalent safeguards will be maintained.

## **Permit the use of suppressors by making conservation hunting a genuine reason to apply for a permit**

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At Schedule 4.2, the Bill amends the *Weapons Prohibition Act 1998 (NSW)* (the Weapons Prohibition Act) to make conservation hunting (again not defined in the Bill) a genuine reason to use a prohibited weapon as outlined in the table to section 11(2). A silencer is classified as a prohibited weapon under the Weapons Prohibition Act. When a silencer is attached to a firearm, the firearm is classified as a prohibited firearm<sup>36</sup>. There are arguments made in the Second Reading Speech to the effect that suppressors are not true silencers, that industrial hearing injury is a risk encountered by recreational hunters, and that silencers or suppressors are not associated with criminal activity.

With respect to the hearing protection aspect there are commercially available and very cost-effective hearing protection options on the market, including in-ear bud options which do not cancel all background noise. NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) has ruled conclusively on the point in any event, when Dr Lucy held in 2019 that “that, irrespective of whether the question is considered on a subjective or an objective basis, recreational shooting does not require the possession or use of a silencer.”<sup>37</sup>

The Weapons Prohibition Act is well understood, and an effectively enforced piece of legislation, that is supported by most citizens, not just in NSW, but in similar contexts across Australia. There is a lot to be said for the way Australia has managed gun control post-1996, and it is an effort for which we regularly receive international praise. In that context, the reality is that this Bill is already breaking new ground in terms of the vast areas of public and Crown land that may become available to hunters, where previously no hunting has taken place. The opportunity for innocent but dangerous interactions between non-hunting users of the space and hunters is obvious.

This amendment is progressing too quickly and has had insufficient consultation to justify making a consequential amendment of this type to the Weapons Prohibition Act. Amendments tabled by the Government, and other political parties support the deletion of this amendment. No doubt NSW Police will have been consulted by the Government, but in many contexts, gun safety advocates have expressed serious concerns with this inclusion<sup>38</sup>. The RSPCA opposes the amendment permitting conservation hunting to form a genuine reason for the application for a prohibited weapons licence.

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<sup>35</sup> RSPCA knowledgebase. How does hunting affect non-target animals. (accessed online 21.07.2025) <<https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/how-does-hunting-affect-non-target-animals/>

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/online\\_services/firearms/permits/prohibited\\_weapon\\_permits/silencer](https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/online_services/firearms/permits/prohibited_weapon_permits/silencer)

<sup>37</sup> *Burton v Commissioner of Police, NSW Police Force [2019] NSWCATAD 14*

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Bendel, SMH Online, 29.06.2025, “Shooters want a ‘right to hunt’. How about a right not to be shot?”, available online, accessed 23.07.2025, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/shooters-want-a-right-to-hunt-how-about-a-right-not-to-be-shot-20250619-p5m8ro.html>



## Amending the *Crown Land Management Act 2016* to establish the Crown land that is available for hunting and the mechanisms by which Crown land may be made available for hunting.

The current legislation permits hunting on Crown land only for individuals holding a restricted licence, which requires training in firearm safety, ethical hunting practices, and regulatory compliance. This amendment will make additional Crown land accessible to individuals, who are unlikely to have completed the necessary training. Crown land is widely used by the public, including bushwalkers, campers, cyclists, researchers, landholders, and Indigenous communities. Permitting hunting by inadequately trained individuals in these shared spaces poses a serious risk to public safety.

Furthermore, expanding hunting access without maintaining existing training standards increases the risk of animal suffering, killing of misidentified non-target and endangered species, and ecological disruption. It may also interfere with coordinated, science-based pest management programs run by government and conservation agencies.

The Legislation Review Committee expresses concern<sup>39</sup> that subordinate instruments are not subject to parliamentary scrutiny and that the Bill should set out the terms by which Crown land might be declared conservation hunting areas by the Minister. There is no specific requirement that the CHA be consulted, just that they ‘may’ be consulted. The RSPCA believes that the public has not had sufficient opportunity to consider and engage with the potential consequences of the amendment in relation to future land use in NSW. The Bill is insufficiently detailed, and the plan of management provisions does not assist members of the public to understand whether Crown land might become designated for conservation hunting. Such substantive matters should be detailed in the text of the Bill so they can be considered, not just by Parliament, but by the people of NSW, particularly where they affect the public's ability to access Crown land freely and safely.

## Conclusion

For the reasons set out in the table and comments above, RSPCA does not support the Bill to amend the *Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002 (NSW)*.

- a) It poses significant risks to public safety, animal welfare and significantly weakens safeguards necessary to regulate hunting in NSW.
- b) By creating a statutory right to hunt, replacing restricted licences, expanding access to hunt on Crown land, and broadening the use of equipment such as suppressors, it poses serious risks to public safety and animal welfare.
- c) By replacing restricted licences with conservation licences which are undefined and do not require mandatory training, it is likely to increase the risk of animal suffering through incomplete or ineffective kills and increases the likelihood of target misidentification, leading to the harm or death of non-target and endangered species.
- d) It replaces one statutory authority – the Game and Pest Management Advisory Board, with another, more expensive statutory authority – the Conservation Hunting Authority, the

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<sup>39</sup> Parliament of NSW, Legislation Review Digest No 31/58 3 June 2025, page 16

membership of which is very problematic, dominated as it is by hunting interests, and without adequate representation from conservation ecology, pest management, veterinary, animal welfare experts or firearms and public safety expertise. This structure risks undermining evidence-based pest management.

- e) The amendments promote recreational hunting as a form of pest control, despite clear evidence that it is not effective at delivering meaningful pest control outcomes. Recreational hunting is neither a safe nor effective method of pest control and should not be considered as such.