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**THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION A COMMITTEE
MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON WEDNESDAY,
30 NOVEMBER 2016.**

INQUIRY INTO WILD FALLOW DEER

Mr GERARD WILLIAM BRERETON, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY
DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Armstrong) - Welcome to the public hearing today. All evidence given in this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee website when it becomes available.

Mr BRERETON - Thanks for the opportunity to come and speak today. I am a hunting coordinator. I represent about 30 hunting families on various properties throughout the central highlands of Tasmania. I do that on a voluntary basis. I liaise closely with the landowner and in return I provide hunters to him to provide the service for controlling wallaby, deer, labour, property improvements - whatever he needs. I have been doing that for the past eight years.

In that time I have seen an increase in the population of deer mainly due to extensive cropping and irrigation programs. I have also seen a huge increase in the demand for access to the deer. I regularly get telephone calls from prospective hunters looking for some access. There is no way I could possibly keep up with the demand for access.

On one property I coordinate, hunters pay in excess of \$1 000 a year for access. They also have to provide working bees, security patrols of the property, property improvements, fencing, rock collecting and all sorts of different things. They also provide maintenance to the property's building assets that fall into disrepair. This property I am speaking about does not have any livestock. It is not a grazing operation. It is just native bushland and plantation. There are several thousand hectares of plantation on this property and as a result, without having livestock the only way this property can generate income is from recreational hunting. I am a big believer in promoting recreational hunting in Tasmania.

CHAIR - How many hectares is this farm?

Mr BRERETON - The properties I represent, three or four properties, are 18 000 acres in total.

CHAIR - They are all plantation properties?

Mr BRERETON - Plantation-based, natural bushland. There is some -

CHAIR - No cropping?

Mr BRERETON - No, cropping. There are some areas of natural marshlands that have been grazed in the past. So there is some introduction of European grasses spread throughout the area,

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which is the main food source for the deer. There are no cropping programs other than improved pasture that has been planted in the past to provide a winter feed source for the deer. It might only be a couple of acres of turnip or some other type of clover or something like that.

CHAIR - You pay over \$1000 a year for access and other work you do on the farm?

Mr BRERETON - Yes. All our hunters have to sign a contract. In part of that contract it states the fee they have to pay. It also mentions they have to conduct two full-day working bees. They also have to shoot a minimum amount of wallaby and possum. They also have to provide security patrols; when the deer are in rut they are a lot more visible. The male deer, the bucks, are standing out in the open and then they are croaking and working does, so we provide security for those deer to make sure we do not have any illegal trespassing to take those deer.

Ms RATTRAY - A big commitment then.

Mr BRERETON - It is a massive commitment. If I had the room I could put on another 50 hunters tomorrow. There is a huge demand for access to deer.

CHAIR - Is poaching an issue?

Mr BRERETON - Poaching is an issue. I like to differentiate poaching and hunting, because poaching is criminal. They are not recreational hunters at all. Sometimes poaching is done from roadsides, sometimes from people accessing the area from other properties. Unfortunately, the game management unit and Parks and Wildlife are stretched to their limit. They do not have enough men on the ground to stop it from happening.

Ms RATTRAY - To patrol.

Mr BRERETON - Yes. That is why hunters on the properties have to do the patrolling themselves. If we see any illegal activity we report it to the wildlife management branch and let them deal with it from there.

We also have security cameras set up, trail cameras mounted on a tree. We put those in areas where we think we might be getting poaching. The reason we are prepared to do that is because it is huge commitment for hunters to look after the deer they have by letting the smaller, immature animals go until they get to the size where they can be harvested as a trophy. A poacher can come onto the property and undo all that hard work in a couple of minutes. That is why they are prepared to go to the level they do to ensure they are protected.

Mr FARRELL - Gerard, you mentioned the increase in deer population, and there are mad keen hunters that you cannot accommodate. Do you see any solution to that problem? What is standing in the way?

Mr BRERETON - The majority of landowners are now aware and they see the deer as an asset. The hunters they have on their properties are able to control the numbers. Rather than having to get more hunters on, they apply for crop protection permits. The hunters on the property are awarded with those permits, so they can take more than the three deer they are allocated with their licence. They might be able to take five or six.

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Even though the population has grown, I do not think the number of hunters has grown with it. There is a lot more deer now on public land, which I would like to see opened up for recreational hunting. It works in other states. In Victoria, for example, there are vast amounts of public land. You can purchase your licence and go hunting. I see that as a viable solution.

The increase in population in the traditional home range of the deer, I don't think has grown that much. In the past 12 months the deer have been a lot more visible due to the dry season we had. Whereas the majority of the deer might be able to be sustained in the forested areas and have to frequently access a crop for feed, they could be sustained in the forest. The dry season last year meant the deer were a lot more visible. The farmers were up against it as well. Something had to give and the deer were in the cross hairs.

We have a lot of deer now in non-traditional areas, the majority of which have come about from deer farm escapes. They do not belong there. Recreational hunting has been to blame in the past - hunters transporting deer to areas and letting them go. I cannot say, in my experience, I have ever heard of anybody doing that. I know in the Huon there have been quite a few deer escapes from different deer farms. Sometimes trees have fallen across fences or the Huon River flooded and washed a lot of the fences out. I have been contacted by landowners in that area to help control the deer. Unfortunately, we are not talking about big properties, not talking about hundreds and thousands of acres like there might be in the Central Highlands. My brother is one example. He has a herd of deer which travel between his property and five or six others. He only has about 20 acres and the houses are too close to discharge a firearm in that area. How do you manage them? That is something I do not have the answer for, but they do not belong and should not be there.

Mr FARRELL - You would be supportive of culling in areas that deer have started to inhabit and confine them to the traditional areas?

Mr BRERETON - 100 per cent; that is right. We talk about traditional areas. The deer in the Central Highlands are as much a part of that landscape as the sandstone buildings and hawthorn hedgerows. You drive through Campbell Town now and there are deer on the pub, a stag, and the butcher has a stag. They belong there. They have been there nearly as long as we have. The other areas, especially the Huon, which I can speak for, for example -

Ms RATTRAY - Bruny Island.

Mr BRERETON - They should not be there. How we get rid of them is a tough one but in my experience the amount of recreational hunters that are calling me saying, 'I want somewhere to go. I need some access.' If the landowners are prepared to let some recreational hunters in, they will pay to remove the deer. We do not need to pay professionals or contract shooters to shoot from helicopters when we have recreational hunters prepared to do it for free, and pay to do it.

Mr FARRELL - From your experience in hunting, and the Bruny Island example in particular, I am trying to gauge what stage it is at. How many deer are roaming there at the moment and how long before it becomes a real problem? Is it out of control?

Mr BRERETON - I do not know. I have had to deal with the game management unit a lot with our property based game management plans and they are excellent. I cannot fault them. Even though we do not do a lot of cropping ourselves, if we have deer that are on our property that may be travelling to a farmer's crops, we will apply for permits and we will try to shoot those

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deer before they cause a problem anywhere else. But they are overworked. They do not have the resources they need. I think you will find with a lot of landowners, once they have decided they have a problem with deer, they might have a crop starting to strike, they have a problem with deer, they want the tags right away. They are trying to deal with everybody else's issues as well. These areas, we talk about Bruny Island, you cannot put in front of the landowners that have crops getting eaten by deer. In a way, I think it almost has to take precedence.

Mr FARRELL - How many people do you deal with directly in the department? It is only a small department.

Mr BRERETON - It is only a small department. Matt Byrne is our main point of contact. I have had regular meetings with Matt on the property. I take him around and show him what we are doing, where we have problems, ask what he suggests. They are the experts. His phone constantly rings. I feel sorry for the guys because they are overworked and there is nothing that can be done. I would love to see more emphasis put on these non-traditional areas. I do not have all the answers but I know they are there and we have to do something about it. I read a lot of the submissions.

A lot of submissions came in from areas outside the traditional. They might say, 'I saw a deer. I nearly ran over one in my car and I was driving through Dover', through Southport or Glen Huon. If it was not for those deer in those areas causing a problem I do not think we would need to have the inquiry at all.

Mr FARRELL - That is why. We have heard a lot of submissions and we do not have all the answers yet, but hopefully we will find a few as we go through. There are a lot of these smaller issues in the evidence we have taken.

Mr BRERETON - I am not familiar with any recreational hunters relocating deer to build up a herd. It is two or three generations before there would be a huntable population anyway. I saw on the news last night that in 2050 there could be a million deer. I cannot see how that would ever be the case if the deer have been around for about 180 years and we are at about 20 000, how in the next 30 years we are going to go to a million. It is not going to happen.

CHAIR - A couple of presenters put that up.

Mr BRERETON - Over 5000 recreational licenses will be sold this year. It is increasing every year and the experience I have with the requests for access is about on par. The amount of people continues to grow. We will never ever see in Tasmania a stage where we have no recreational hunters and we cannot control the problem.

Mr FARRELL - Do you feel part of the problem might be the lack of scientific evidence and the real knowledge of where deer are and what they are up to?

Mr BRERETON - Not really. Anybody who has been involved with the management of deer knows there are a lot of unanswered questions. It is straightforward that the fallow deer we have are known as a park deer. They are not going to do well in any forested area. They talk about World Heritage Areas as being right out on the west coast and the south-west corner. The deer have evolved eating European grasses and that is why they are found on the side of the roads, on the side of cropping programs on the side of paddocks. They are not going to do well in any of these very hard to get to areas where there is no European grass. We do not have the threat of the

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deer taking over the whole state. I do not think it is ever going to be a problem, which makes it easier for us to control. We know they are going to be around the edges of farm fringe country. How we control in the non-traditional areas is anyone's guess.

Mr FARRELL - The different methods in the mainland states of Australia have been brought up a few times. What are your thoughts on the way deer are managed in Victoria compared to Tasmania? Is it an apples and apples thing, or apples and something else?

Mr BRERETON - The difference with Victoria is the Alpine National Park where deer hunting is allowed. I regularly travel interstate to hunt deer in the Alpine National Park. It is a \$30 licence and you have this vast area. I have experience in the meat industry, so we harvest a lot of deer over there and we are allowed to bring all the meat back and the meat is processed for whatever we want to do - smallgoods. The good thing about the way it works in Victoria would be, you can drive to the top of the mountain and as far as you can see, you are allowed to go. You have all this access. The roads are fairly well maintained. You have the opportunity. In Tasmania, we do not have that opportunity for the public land. If you are prepared to go and hunt and you want to pay your licence, a lot of people will travel straight to Victoria because they cannot find anywhere to go in Tasmania.

Mr FARRELL - You mentioned the meat in Victoria. You can have it slaughtered or processed for human consumption?

Mr BRERETON - It is the same in Tasmania. As a recreational hunter, you can harvest deer for your own purpose. The difference between Victoria and Tasmania would be, where I go there is a different species of deer, they are about three times the size, the sambar. On ABC News last night they showed footage of sambar instead of fallow deer. It is no different in Tasmania.

Of the recreational hunters I know, some hunters are targeting trophy stags and then will shoot their antlerless deer for meat during the winter season. There are a lot of recreational hunters not after big trophy stags; they are after an animal for meat and that is it. They will shoot as many as they are allowed to shoot. They will use their first three tags, the first three deer they see, if they are allowed to shoot them then they will shoot them. The meat is good quality and for our purpose, it fits the need.

You talk about commercially harvesting the deer. I am trade qualified in meat, butcher and slaughtering. When I worked at the abattoirs I saw the deer farmers who used to process farm deer. Because it is a niche market, they had to be very particular about the age of the animals, the fat content and they had to be absolutely perfect. There is no way you could harvest wild deer and get that same level of precision. I know what it is like. If I am going out to harvest some deer for meat and there is an antlerless deer and I will take that animal, until I start processing that animal I do not know if it is going to be suitable for smallgoods or steaks. It depends on the age, what it has been feeding on - there are so many variables. Commercially harvesting deer for the restaurant trade - there is no consistency.

Ms RATTRAY - What about the pet industry?

Mr BRERETON - It's too good a meat to feed to pets. In 2015 about 700 000 wallaby were harvested on crop protection permits. We have a huge wallaby and possum problem, which is why a lot of the landowners are prepared to give people access to deer. They are prepared to put up with a herd of deer because it means the hunters will control the wallaby and the possums.

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Anywhere you go there are dead wallabies on the side of the road. Anywhere you go now there is a huge population of wallabies.

Ms RATTRAY - It is everywhere you go.

Mr BRERETON - They are literally everywhere, so if we're talking about a pet meat trade why don't we have more people commercially harvesting wallaby? It's not a very glamorous job. You're out all hours of the night and it's hard work.

Mr MULDER - And they are everywhere.

Mr BRERETON - They are.

Mr MULDER - Within 200 metres of the Tasman Bridge and the Tasman Highway in the middle of the urban area - just a little hill - there is roadkill.

Mr BRERETON - If we want to talk about a pet meat trade, that is the avenue we need to go down. When you have a guy who is prepared to pay thousands of dollars for access and do all this work just to be able to harvest three deer - that's all he wants and all his licence allows him to take - putting them into pet meat would be disastrous.

CHAIR - You are a qualified butcher and slaughterman, Gerard, aren't you?

Mr BRERETON - Yes, I am. I have trade certification in that.

Ms RATTRAY - What is your view on extending the season and also additional tags? What would be your best outcome if the committee thought that might be a recommendation?

Mr BRERETON - Our property is represented on the Tasmanian Deer Advisory Committee so we were pivotal in the recent changes. We made a recommendation at the TDAC that we were looking to extending the deer season and increasing the take limit. I think it needed to be done. The gap was widening between the deer harvested on crop protection permits and the recreational take and we want to bring the recreational take back to that level. It would have been nice to have extended the antler season a little bit more. From my understanding, the TFGA were happy to leave it at the status quo, as it remained. I don't know the reason for that. That's up to them.

Ms RATTRAY - We'll ask them a bit later.

Mr BRERETON - Yes. To increase the tags - I think it's a huge reward for recreational hunters to know they can take three animals instead of two. For a lot of them we haven't got the data back yet to see what the take was. This year is probably not going to be the best example because it was such a very dry year in March 2016 and the deer were very dispersed and hard to find. There was not a lot of trophy potential because of the drought. Obviously that is going to change a lot now with all the rain we've had.

I would like to see the buck season remain where it stands at the moment, which is around late February to early April, which gives the person who wants to take a buck really good-quality meat. For somebody who wants to take a trophy animal that is the perfect time to be doing it. Then we wait until after the breeding season has finished and start the season again in May for the antlerless deer and continue that right through to October to when the crop protection permits are

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finished. That gives recreational hunters plenty of time to go and take the animals. That also might mean that rather than going to their usual place in the highlands, if they know they have four or five months to take an antler-less deer, they might go to these fringe areas in the Huon and other spots and say to landowners, 'I hear you've got a problem with some deer. You might only have a small population and it's going to be hard to get but I've got the time to do it so I'd like to help you try and sort this problem out.'

At the moment when the season is only short they don't have a lot of time to muck about. You've got to get your animals because once the season is finished you've got to wait until next year, but by extending that, I know myself I'd be more inclined to hunt these areas that are a little more difficult but you know there is deer there.

Ms RATTRAY - What about an increase of two bucks - from one to two?

Mr BRERETON - They way quality deer management works now is that it's property-based. Some properties are going to be able to harvest quite a few bucks and the opportunity for them if they need to do that, if they've got an overabundance of male deer, they can get their permits to do it. It is property-based, whereas our property does not have a high enough population of male deer. We don't shoot any male deer that are antlerless, like the buck borns. Even though you are allowed to harvest them before they grow their spike we don't because we've got too many females and not enough males. We're concentrating on harvesting our females but I think that has to be property-based. The game management unit offers that service so that if you've got too male deer you can get your permits. You're not going to get something that works for everyone across the board, which is why there has to be options like that.

Mr GAFFNEY - I was interested in your introduction where you commented that you were disappointed to read that the Legislative Council found it necessary to conduct an inquiry into fallow deer in Tasmania. Could you explain why you felt disappointed that we were doing that?

Mr BRERETON - In the lead-up to the inquiry there were quite a few letters to the editor and in different media outlets mentioning a huge problem with deer. These figures were getting thrown up, like we've got 50 000, 100 000, we could have a million. Somebody in the know like myself realises that we might have some problems in areas but they're trying to blanket deer as this pest species that needs to be eradicated and that's not the case. I know what my recreational hunters can provide to the landowners we service. It was just disappointing to have to come to this stage, I suppose, because the landowners I deal with know that recreational hunting and deer are an asset to them and without them they would have a lot more problems than they do. It's just disappointing. Unfortunately the deer get the rough end of the stick - they're the introduced species, they're a pest, they're vermin, but that's not the case at all.

Mr GAFFNEY - I think you have answered the question yourself. Isn't that exactly the reason we need to have an inquiry so that the correct information can be put out into the public to give people from all different aspects like yourself the opportunity to present to the legislation?

Mr BRERETON - I suppose, but I'm not really sure how it works. I would expect as members representing the area that people would come to you and say, 'I don't have a problem with deer' or 'I do have a problem with deer'. It has come to the point where we've got to sit down and everyone talk about it now. It's good that there is an opportunity to do it but I wish it didn't have to come to this anyway. I wish we didn't have deer in non-traditional areas that were causing a problem. I wish it hadn't come to that stage at all.

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Mr GAFFNEY - It has been highlighted twice and, as you have said, on some properties where they are properly managed there is not an issue. We heard from one group yesterday that it is a real issue for the Tasmanian Land Conservancy. I think they said they had 32 000 hectares, a massive figure, that they control and it is a real issue for them.

Mr BRERETON - But before the TLC had that land, was there an established population of deer there?

Mr GAFFNEY - Regardless, that is not the issue.

Mr BRERETON - What are they doing? Do they have recreational hunters on their property?

Mr GAFFNEY - I suggest you read their submission because they have no issue with deer hunting. They have hunters on their property. It is not as though you cannot go on there. They already have 60 or 70 hunters who hunt some of their properties. Their issue is that for control of their land for environmental purposes, deer are a real problem to them. I think they only get \$7000 or \$8000 through their fees because of the traditional generations of people who have hunted those properties. They are not against deer hunting at all but what they were highlighting in their submission is that they have a lot of damage from poachers and people breaking in and damaging some of the environmental areas that they need to protect.

Mr BRERETON - That's illegal activity. That has nothing to do with deer. That's criminal activity.

Mr GAFFNEY - That is true but it is a problem and an issue to them. While your properties are being well managed and it is not an issue, they do have an issue. That is why, if we did not have this inquiry, in 10 years time if we don't do something about those properties not being managed, it will be a greater problem.

Mr BRERETON - It is up to the landowner to manage the property, as they need to. We might be able to have a population of 100 deer, and we can keep the numbers to that level, whereas if the TLC is having problems with an excess amount of deer, is it that they do not have enough recreational hunters? There are avenues - if they need permits to destroy the deer, crop protection permits, they can request those permits.

Mr GAFFNEY - They do though. I suggest you read the submission and read *Hansard*. One of their ideas is they do not want the season to be lengthened because they have a lot of people who do other environmental work on their properties - they carry out other environmental stuff. They don't want the season lengthened because that inhibits their capacity to have other people on those properties doing the work they need to undertake. From a tourism perspective and protection of their environment and surrounds, the Tasmanian Land Conservancy is growing all the time from when it began because people are into that sort of thing. I think there is a need for something like this so they can hear how it is being managed in other places. We suggested some of the other hunting areas are managed and get a profitable return. They are aware of those issues.

Mr BRERETON - That is what the game management unit is there for, to provide assistance where it is needed. I cannot believe if you have a problem with excess deer - there are avenues

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you need to take, you can apply for crop protection permits or you can get recreational hunters - whatever you need to do. Saying, 'I've got a problem with deer. I don't want the season extended because we want to do other stuff.' Do you want to sort the problem or not? What do you want to do? It is easy enough to complain and say, 'I've got too many deer', but what are they actively trying to do to help the issue?

CHAIR - Mike made them aware of that yesterday.

Mr GAFFNEY - To be fair to them, they are in favour of a statewide cull to bring numbers down. But when we asked them what they thought a statewide cull is, it was hard for them to say. They are worried the growth in the numbers is beyond their means, I suppose, to control.

Mr BRERETON - As I have mentioned before, the growth in numbers can appear to be greater than it is. With the season we have had there is no feed at all in the fringe areas, when you go from paddocks to the native bush. Deer are a browser, so they will have a pick of this and a pick of that, as they are moving around. When there is no feed to sustain them in the bush because it is so dry and they are being forced to come into the paddocks, that is when they are visible. You may say you have 500 deer living on my property, whereas last year you only had 250. That may be because the other 250 were happy to live in the forest and weren't so visible. If you have seen twice the amount of deer on your property it doesn't mean the numbers have doubled. It could just mean that they are more visible.

Mr MULDER - How many deer are out there and how do you know? How do you come to your number of 20 000?

Mr BRERETON - I don't know how many deer are out there.

Mr MULDER - It has been suggested there ought to be an open season with no bag limits, but in the non-traditional areas. In other words, have controls on your property where they traditionally are, but what is your view on having a general cull to eradicate deer from those areas they shouldn't be?

Mr BRERETON - There is no doubt deer have to be controlled in these non-traditional areas. How the best to do that, I don't know. How you would legislate an open season outside the traditional areas, I don't know. The deer don't belong there and they have to be controlled somehow.

Mr MULDER - You are for eradicating deer out of places they don't belong?

Mr BRERETON - Out of the non-traditional areas - they don't belong there.

Mr MULDER - My last question, using your butcher skills and knowledge, it is good meat so is there a good reason you couldn't sell it? If people took more deer, why wouldn't they be allowed to on-sell it?

Mr BRERETON - The Meat Hygiene Act is there for a reason and it has been written to protect consumers.

Mr MULDER - If we had someone with your skills, for example, on the hunting party who could deal with the animal, like you do for your own consumption?

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Mr BRERETON - Right. But the reward for a recreational hunter is that you get to keep the meat yourself. Why on earth I would go out -

Mr MULDER - If we said you can take five or 10 deer now, particularly in the non-traditional areas, wouldn't it be great if you could then, with your professional skills, knowledge and capacity?

Mr BRERETON - If somebody wants to buy a piece of venison that it why we have deer farmers to provide it.

Mr MULDER - Okay, so it is a competition with deer farmers. You also said it was too good to be pet meat. Surely that is better than burying the carcasses.

Mr BRERETON - I have never heard of this. There have been rumours around in the past there are these great big holes full of deer they cull and dump them. I have never, ever seen anything like that. The recreational hunters that approach me, if they are prepared to pay \$1000 for three deer, they are not going to put them in a hole. There is a huge demand for it.

CHAIR - Thanks, Gerard, for making your time available.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

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Mr JOHN KELLY, LENAHA GAME MEATS, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Armstrong) - Welcome to the public hearing today. All evidence given in this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee website when it becomes available.

Mr KELLY - Lenah Game Meats is a seasoned producer and marketer of game meats. We have been in the game for 23 years. I am a meat scientist and an agricultural scientist by training. I have worked in the deer industry in the United Kingdom, across Australia and I was, prior to setting up Lenah, the specialist deer farming adviser for the Department and Agriculture in Tasmania.

As a meat scientist, I have done considerable and reasonably important meat science research work into the factors affecting venison eating quality. We supply wallaby to over 90 retail outlets and 40 restaurants on a weekly basis. We have wallaby on over 100 restaurant menus across Tasmania a year and we send as far afield as Cairns. We have been doing so for over 20 years. We utilise the entire carcass. Nothing is wasted in what we do. We process it into high-value cuts for the restaurant trade. These go into Woolworths and supermarkets across Melbourne, and as far afield as Brisbane. We process into smallgoods. These go into Woolworths and Coles a most major IGAs in Tasmania, and quite a number in Melbourne. We do other smallgoods like salami and smoked wallaby. Nothing is wasted. Our bones are processed into dog products. About the only things that leaves our premises other than in a pack are the heads and hoppers.

Venison is an important part of the story. Our products have been the signature dish of some of the country's top restaurants. It has been on the menu at Stillwater, for example, almost consistently for 10 years. We have won multiple medals and accolades for our products, including repeated gold and silver medals at Hobart Shows. Our wallaby has twice been the *Delicious* magazine best Tasmanian meat product, so when it comes to processing game meat into quality products we've got a rough idea of what we're talking about.

We have significant latent demand for venison. I have imported into Australia from New Zealand six sea containers of venison in the last three years, as well as regular shipments of wild harvested venison from interstate into Tasmania. I'm at the stage now where I don't actively market venison because the product I'm getting I'm not satisfied with, it's not my own product, I don't process it so I can't do the things I want to do with it. I believe I could readily sell the entire Tasmanian crop protection quota if we had access to it. I'm not asking for that, but if we did, I believe we could.

We used to get all of our venison from Tasmanian farms. They were all established by people who retired and deer farming was their passion. Their kids didn't share that passion and eventually they all closed down. We used to take the entire deer productivity off the Connorville deer farm, for example. For Roz O'Connor it was her passion. Roderick didn't share it when he took over and he shut down the deer farm to focus on what he wanted to do. The same story has happened across all the major deer farms in the state, basically, except one in terms of the original major deer farms.

To prepare this submission I browsed through some of the other written submissions made to this inquiry and I feel it is worthwhile to review some of the recurrent points in them. You guys

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have been repeatedly told deer are a problem for farmers. One submission from a farmer estimated he could take 2000 deer a year off his one property alone. Others have estimated the damage at \$30 000 to \$250 000 a year from feral deer on their properties. I will come to why I believe that deer are a problem for some but not for other properties. There is no doubt that deer are a problem within the environment; you have been told that repeatedly as well. What hasn't been said in these submissions is that the first time someone gets killed in a road accident with a feral deer, that is when the public outrage will really start.

You have been told consistently that the deer population is increasing. This graph in the DPIPWE submission is telling. That is the average transect value across the state and it shows a very significant increase. The department at UTAS estimated that by 2050, I think it was, there will be 1 million deer in the state if we stick with the current management regime. You have also been told consistently by recreational shooters that the recreational value of deer is incentive enough to deliver effective control. My question to you is that if that's the case, why is the population exploding?

You have been told by existing deer farmers and recreational shooters that we can't produce a quality product from wild harvested deer because the hygiene standards would be suspect. I must admit I find that one of the most insulting comments in all of the submissions. I get a lot of flak on this issue. I process 20 000 wallaby a year and supply some of the best restaurants in the country with that product. I am a meat scientist. I know what I am doing with meat; I know how to ensure the products I put into each type of package are suitable for the market I am sending them to.

We harvest feral deer. The top-quality ones go to the restaurant trade, the lower-quality ones go to smallgoods manufacture and if there is some that are emaciated and not suitable for smallgoods manufacture, they go to pet food. It's very simple if you know what you're doing. We know what we're doing.

Regardless, that is exactly what government regulations are there for. This is the Australian Standard for the hygienic production of game meat for human consumption. Appendix G is inspection procedures for wild deer. That lays out the production standards required to process wild deer to make it suitable for human consumption. It is done in South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland commercially. There is no reason we can't do it here. In fact, the only legislative, regulatory requirement to enable us to do it here - we are already licensed to do it here, we operate under this standard - is a change on the licence condition on the crop protection permits to enable the product to be sold commercially. That's all that has to be done regulatorily to enable us or any other game meat operator who operates under this standard to process feral deer for human consumption.

You have been told that we are a threat to deer farmers. Now, if wild harvested venison was a threat to Tasmanian deer farmers, imports from the mainland would have put them out of business five years ago. That's how long I've been bringing in wild harvested venison from interstate. Fairly consistently at one stage, I was bringing in a tonne a month. The deer farmers are still there. Regardless, I put it to you, is it really the role of government to restrict free trade? Is that how government works in this country? Isn't our political system about free and open competition?

You have been told that commercial use would lead to increased trespass and poaching. That is a legal issue. My guys have to do a TAFE course to be registered to supply for human

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consumption. They have to be assessed by two different government departments and they get audited. For a lot of them it's their business, their living. They're not going to go risking that by shooting somewhere they're not allowed to shoot.

Finally, you have been told that commercial use is a threat to recreational shooters. This is simply nonsense. Recreational shooters are willing to pay significant sums for access to properties to shoot their deer. They currently do. These sums are considerably more than commercial shooters can ever afford to pay. It is actually the recreational shooter who currently outbids commercial shooters for property access, not the other way around. That happens on a lot of properties. A lot of properties my guys just can't get onto because the recreational shooters have them tied up with the fees they pay for deer. My guys just don't get a look-in. That is the current reality.

As a commercial operator, I'm not suggesting open-slather access to deer. That may be an option you guys might wish to consider, but all I'm suggesting is that under the current system commercial access be made to crop protection permits. I don't claim commercial access is a single solution. I think the existing problem needs other solutions, but I believe it clearly can be a part of the solution. The current system isn't working. Deer numbers are increasing. They are spreading the range. The simple reason for that is something you consistently hear recreational shooters saying - and my commercial shooters saying - that there is only so much venison you can give away. You get to the point where you just can't get rid of it, so why shoot it? People don't like shooting something just to leave it on the ground. My commercial shooters have to shoot a significant number of them to keep their access for wallabies, so they give away a bit, but there's only so much you can give away.

There is a simple reason. I believe that recreational shooters simply don't have a strong enough incentive to deliver the hunting pressure needed to bring back deer under control. Commercial shooting can deliver an additional incentive above that of recreational shooting, which will increase the chance of the full crop protection quota being taken. It has come back to that point about what it is costing individual farmers. I believe the committee should be asking why individual farmers should be forced by government regulation to rely solely on recreational shooters. I know a great number of farmers who would prefer to deal with commercial shooters to control wallaby and possum on their properties. That's where most of my guys shoot. They prefer to deal with commercial shooters and it enables them to deal with only two or three shooters to get the job done rather than having to deal with 30 or 40 shooters to try to get the job done. The guys who principally rely on commercial shooters also perceive that they do a better job, but why should they not be allowed to rely on them for deer control. What role does government have in telling them which class of shooters they should allow on their property and that they need to deal with 30 shooters to get the job done rather than two. The comment was made by the previous submission that the Tasmanian Land Conservancy should manage the property as they need to to control deer. I suggest they should be able to manage their property as they wish to to control deer.

Commercial use would not spell the end of recreational shooting. It has not done with wallaby. It will not do with deer. Recreational shooters can and do pay large amounts of money for access to deer and there will be properties that will continue to prefer to rely on recreational shooters to get the job done on their place. However, a significant number of farmers prefer to deal with commercial shooters.

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We can turn wild harvested Tasmanian fallow venison into products which we currently produce and sell across the country. Deer are currently being culled in large numbers and left on the ground or put in pits, or at best maybe used for dog tucker. We can turn that product into a significant number of jobs. We can provide a contribution to control of feral deer and we can do that at no impost, I believe, on recreational shooters.

CHAIR - John, you were saying that you are not marketing venison as much as you used to.

Mr KELLY - I still sell it but I do not promote it.

CHAIR - The deer farmers that are left in Tasmania, do you source from all those deer farmers?

Mr KELLY - No, I do not source from any of them.

CHAIR - You do not? Can you tell me why?

Mr KELLY - There are no kill facilities. Slaughtering fallow deer to produce a quality product is one of the toughest gigs there is in the meat industry. Fallow deer are very, very easily stressed. You put them under the slightest bit of stress at pre-slaughter you wind up with a condition called ecchymosis throughout the meat. That is blood spotting if you have ever seen it.

Ms RATTRAY - We heard about that yesterday.

Mr KELLY - It makes the meat dry, tough and reduces its shelf life. It makes it unacceptable to the top end of the restaurant trade. As soon as you take a deer off a farm, put him on a truck, try to take him somewhere to slaughter, if anything goes wrong in that process, if it is not all done by people who are really, really good at the job, then the product is dreadful. Currently there are only two places in the state that will kill deer. They are both effectively on private farms slaughtering their own deer. One of them takes in outside deer but one is just slaughtering deer off their own farm.

CHAIR - You do not buy any from that one that slaughters his own on his own farm.

Mr KELLY - No. We are competition, I guess. He does his own marketing and does not have surplus productivity.

CHAIR - We have hear from other deer farmers that they have surplus deer.

Mr KELLY - There is a difference between surplus deer -

CHAIR - Well, not surplus, but they have deer there for sale, but you will not buy from them because of the slaughtering issue.

Mr KELLY - There is a difference between having deer for sale and deer suitable for slaughter for human consumption.

CHAIR - The deer that you imported from Victoria or New Zealand, you are bringing in the meat. Where are they slaughtered? Are they slaughtered on the farm or are they slaughtered in the bush?

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Mr KELLY - Most of the product out of New Zealand is red deer venison, which is a very different animal to fallow - nowhere near as flighty as fallow. It is processed in a very professional industry. I have done a study tour of the New Zealand venison industry.

CHAIR - What about the Victorian?

Mr KELLY - It is mostly South Australian and a bit from New South Wales. It is all wild harvested.

CHAIR - So it is harvested in the wild. If the crop protection permits were made available to you, how would that price compare with the price you are bringing in? Would you pay \$5 a kilo or something, compared to the price of bringing it in from South Australia or New Zealand?

Mr KELLY - I would be targeting a considerable price premium above anything else on the market. I know Melbourne chefs who would drool at the mouth at the thought of being able to access wild harvested Tasmanian fallow venison. It is an extremely marketable product. Fallow venison is, aside from roe venison, globally considered the best venison there is. Tasmania has a great name. Wild harvested, currently nationally, is getting a good name and a wild harvested venison product, because of the reasons we talked about concerning stress at slaughter, will always be a superior eating product than anything produced off a farm.

CHAIR - The price you would have to pay for the wild harvested venison from Tasmania, if given permits, could you source that cheaper than the one you are bringing in from South Australia?

Mr KELLY - Probably not. Probably the price difference would not be a lot more by the time I put in all my processing costs. I can do things with it that I cannot do with a pre-packaged product coming in from somewhere else where I do not have control over the quality. There are things I could do with wild harvested venison that would make it a sensational product. I cannot do that with stuff coming in from interstate because we do not have the quality control from the start and the capacity to do the things I would like to do with it.

Mr GAFFNEY - On the wild harvested from South Australia, is that from one supplier or is that from a number?

Mr KELLY - A number. Several of the major kangaroo producers on the mainland. I am also the executive officer of the Kangaroo Industry Association nationally. I know my way around the kangaroo industry nationally. A number of them also process deer. There is one in Adelaide. They process 800 000 kangaroos a year and 10 000 to 20 000 deer. There is a similar one in Walgett in New South Wales. They are not doing deer at the moment but in the past they have done 5000 to 10 000 a year. There are another couple of smaller ones in Queensland.

Mr GAFFNEY - When you say you get the deer from South Australia, does that come over as a carcass?

Mr KELLY - Boneless carcass and we re-package it.

Mr GAFFNEY - You said you are limited in the cut range, product quality and supply reliability.

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Mr KELLY - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - The wild harvested deer in South Australia are not of the same quality?

Mr KELLY - No, it is beautiful quality. It comes back to that idea of grading. If we had a line of 20 deer in front of us, even before we get the skins off them, we can tell you which ones are going first-grade and which ones are second and third-grade. Once we get the skins off them we can refine that judgment. Then we can package them according to that quality assessment. That does not happen on those bigger operations on the mainland because all they want to do is get it off and get it in a box and get it out the door.

Mr GAFFNEY - Is there a difference in the quality of the meat if the killing of the deer was done correctly, so none of the blood issue? Is a deer on a deer farm better quality meat than a wild deer?

Mr KELLY - Done ideally, farm venison can be as good as, if not better than, feral venison. To do farm venison as well as possible is a really tough job. I can draw you the graph. The feed supply for Tasmania looks like that, with that being spring. That is when the best feed is available in Tasmania. Peak time for nutrition in deer, peak feed requirements for deer over the year, looks like that. It peaks during our summer when our feed supply is worse. There is that and there are a number of other reasons. To produce quality venison throughout the year, which the restaurant trade demands, is a really, really tough gig on farms. It will be tough getting it out of the bush as well but you take away the stress issue for starters, you don't have to manage the pre-slaughter stress because the deer you're harvesting - the same as our wallaby system - are in their natural environment going about their natural lives, there's a bright light in their eyes and then they're dead. They don't even know - they didn't hear the bang. In terms of pre-slaughter stress there is no better system to produce meat. Pre-slaughter stress is one of the major contributors to poor meat quality, even in the beef industry. The beef industry has had to do millions and millions of dollars worth of research to eliminate the condition called 'dark cutting meat', which is a very similar thing and is due to pre-slaughter stress. It still occurs, it still happens.

Mr GAFFNEY - For a deer farm to be competitive in the market, what restrictions are there? Are there restrictions on opening up an abattoir on their own property?

Mr KELLY - The largest venison producer in the state now currently has his own abattoir on his property.

Mr GAFFNEY - So that is an option for those people?

Mr KELLY - Yes.

Ms RATTRAY - It's probably expensive though, wouldn't it be, John?

Mr KELLY - It is an expense. Operating a shed isn't cheap. Doing it well isn't cheap. It is an expense and it can be possible, but my point to you guys is when these animals are getting killed and left out there to rot, which they are, or when they're just getting used for dog tucker when they could be generating income and jobs, then why not?

Ms RATTRAY - What about a mobile slaughter set-up? Would that do out in the field?

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Mr KELLY - The meat hygiene regulations are complex and lay out a whole series of conditions for slaughter.

Ms RATTRAY - We do have them in Tasmania.

Mr KELLY - We do, but you're not allowed to sell the product out of them. Mobile butchers are only for your personal consumption.

Ms RATTRAY - Could that be changed?

Mr KELLY - It could. For farm deer, are you suggesting?

Ms RATTRAY - Yes.

Mr KELLY - It could. The best system for killing farm deer is one we used at Connorville and several other major properties where you would load them on to an enclosed trailer which had knocking blocks on it and you would take that to Blue Ribbon or Cressy and put them into that box one at a time and kill them. It is time consuming and expensive. The abattoirs don't like dealing with it because it slows down their process and they have to work around it. If a deer trailer turns up they have to shut down their sheep chain to try to cope with the 20 deer on the trailer. That's a large part of the reason why -

Ms RATTRAY - It is a specialised area really.

Mr KELLY - It's a specialised area, yes.

Ms RATTRAY - But the return for product is a specialised product as well, so when you look at it in that manner it is a reasonable option.

Mr KELLY - Yes. As I say, it is hard to make people understand how difficult it is to produce quality fallow venison from farmed animals. It's really a specialised game - just the handling, the sheds you need. The quality of stockmanship you need to handle those animals in those sheds without killing them from stress is not the sort of thing most farmers want to get involved in.

Ms RATTRAY - Are you aware there has been some changes to the number of tags provided or being allowed for recreational shooters?

Mr KELLY - Yes.

Ms RATTRAY - In your submission you said you do not believe the current system is meeting the population growth. Do you think that will make any difference or do you think it is just a dip in the ocean ?

Mr KELLY - I think it's just a dip in the ocean. The reason the current system isn't working comes back to the issue of incentive. There has to be an incentive to apply sufficient cull pressure on the population to keep it under control and I don't believe recreational shooting outside of properties works very well. On some properties where it is very highly organised it works and works very well but a lot of other properties aren't large enough and don't have the time to manage

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that sort of system so it doesn't deliver sufficient incentive. A commercial harvest will add incentive.

Ms RATTRAY - A commercial harvest for the crop protection allocation would give you consistent access to the product.

Mr KELLY - Yes, that's my suggestion, to allow access to the crop protection allocation for commercial use.

Mr MULDER - I was wondering how the field harvesting has worked, but you have explained that quite well, thank you - a spotlight in their eyes, then they are dead, then they hear the shot, which was an interesting way of putting it. I am sure that is not quite the order. They probably never hear the shot.

Mr KELLY - No, they never hear the shot.

Mr MULDER - What would it need? Just the commercial shooters who are already out there or would you get some of the recreational ones and train them?

Mr KELLY - I currently deal with a dozen commercial shooters and I'm looking for more. I'm looking to treble my throughput of wallaby over the next 18 months so I'm going to need more commercial shooters. If there was commercial access to the crop protection quota, a number of recreational shooters no doubt would take the opportunity to become commercial.

Mr MULDER - So it is a question of training them up.

Mr KELLY - Yes, you have to do a TAFE course that costs about \$2000. You have to put a frame on the back of your ute. You can do it yourself or you can get them made for about \$5000, so it's not an enormous cost.

Mr MULDER - In the field though, once you have shot, isn't there some initial processing you also need to do as a butcher, which no doubt you would train your commercial shooters in - to make sure they bleed and things like that?

Mr KELLY - All I get my people to do in the bush is to bleed them and remove the stomach. Everything else stays in. We do the rest at our premises.

Mr MULDER - You made a remark, which other presenters have disputed, that there are places where the cull results in carcasses being buried in the ground. Some people say they have never heard of that, yet you say it is quite common.

Mr KELLY - Well, no-one's ever going to put their hand up and say they've done that because it's illegal. You've only got to talk to any group of farmers and raise the issue and it'll come up.

Ms RATTRAY - We will raise that with them.

Mr KELLY - Before I go on, Tony, there is no doubt that a large number of animals are killed and left on the ground to rot. My commercial shooters have photo after photo of that. They go round shooting wallabies and will see a deer that has been shot and just left there.

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Mr MULDER - There is also this issue about their ranges and that there are areas of the state where they shouldn't be. Isn't there an opportunity to put commercial shooters in there to try to eradicate them and provide supply to you so you're not going through all the crop protection permit stuff?

Mr KELLY - Commercial shooting won't deliver eradication. I'm not suggesting that and I don't know if anyone is. It will assist in control.

Mr MULDER - Yes, get the numbers right down.

Mr KELLY - Yes, but I'm not suggesting it's a silver bullet in that regard either. I'm suggesting it will add an additional incentive to assisting control.

Mr GAFFNEY - For it to be financially viable, you need a quantity of deer for your commercial shooters so they can go out over a period of time and get as many deer as they can, so you would go to some areas where there were more deer. Say for Bruny Island or some of the islands where there should not be deer, if there was a permit for commercial shooters to go on to Bruny Island and eliminate the deer there, would that be worth your while if there was only a limited number of deer?

Mr KELLY - I have a dozen shooters. On any night of the week there will be one or two of them out shooting somewhere. If there was access to the crop protection quota and if the property they were shooting on had crop protection tags, which we see shooters have, and if they saw a few deer, they'd take them while they were out shooting for wallaby. They'd have that incentive. They're already out there shooting for wallaby so if they come across some deer they'll drop them. He's probably going to get four or five times as much for a deer as he will for a wallaby, maybe, so of course he's doing to drop it if he sees one.

In the isolated example of Bruny that you're arguing, there is a commercial wallaby shooter on Bruny, a commercial wallaby processor on Bruny. If he can get deer he would probably take them but if it is a matter of going somewhere to take two or three deer, no.

Mr GAFFNEY - You will not.

Mr KELLY - As I say, it is not a silver bullet but it is a contribution.

CHAIR - Thank you for your submission and thanks for making yourself available.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

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Mr PETER SKILLERN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AND **Mr DON JONES**, CHAIR, TASMANIAN FARMERS AND GRAZIERS ASSOCIATION, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Armstrong) - Welcome to the public hearing today. All evidence given in this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee website when it becomes available.

Mr JONES - In light of comments made in recent hearings of the committee, I point out the TFGA is the peak governing body of farmers in Tasmania. I am the Chairman of the Policing, Wildlife And Firearms Committee. It is for everyone's understanding as to how that committee is made up. It is not a group of ad hoc people put together. There are special rules. I as the chairman am appointed by the board and we have one farmer representative from each telephone district in the state and then we have each commodity group, that is, wool, wheat, forestry, meat, and vegetable councils all nominate one person to be part of that committee. There is a protocol to follow. My committee provides three delegates to the Game Management Liaison Committee, which advises the minister. Each one of those delegates must come from a telephone area - 62, 63, and 64. We provide one delegate to the Deer Advisory Council and all those people are under instruction of the protocols of TFGA and what is formulated. They do not make their own decisions and things of that nature. That is how it operates.

I think you should be aware of my personal involvement. In 1980 I was appointed to the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Board by the government, under Dr Alec Guiler. I spent 11 years on that board dealing with all wildlife and management matters. The government of the day ceased this in 1991. After that I was invited to join the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, which I did and also became part of their game management unit. I have been chairman for about six years. I was on the expert panel of the alternative to 1080 program. At an invitation from the government in 2012 I had meetings with the Scottish Natural Heritage, particularly on deer management. As a result of that I wrote a paper. I will loan to this committee all the profiles on the code of practice of deer management in Scotland, and some that deal with the tourist industry and things of that nature. That will give you an insight of European standards and things like that.

I make one statement. The TFGA is made up of diverse opinions of farmers. It is very difficult for us to say A, B or C because we have such a diverse range of ideas in the farming community it makes it very difficult to go down one particular path as an organisation. We are trying to go through the process so we can do as best we can.

There is one statement I would make on behalf of TFGA. Under no circumstances will the TFGA support the deregulation of the deer industry. Full stop. Irrevocable. There are a number of reasons for that. Peter, you might like to elaborate on those.

Mr SKILLERN - Our submission is fairly straightforward. We are fairly clear on where we stand. It can be summarised by mentioning a number of issues.

We support culling by recreational hunters in state reserves. We believe it is a mechanism by which the population can be managed in those areas and in the World Heritage Area. I might add there is an opportunity to also deal with the feral cat issue in those areas. While you have hunters

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in there it seems the perfect opportunity to address two significant issues. We have had discussions with government on this. They are aware of our position on that.

We have worked closely with the hunter groups for the last two years to get to a position where hunters and farmers can, by and large, be in agreement with the position. On that basis we support maintaining the recreational deer season as it currently stands, as Don just alluded to.

We also believe there should be access to all year around crop protection permits for deer, as there currently are for wallaby and possums. As the committee would be aware, those crop protection permits now run for a five-year period, as they were previously 12 months.

One of the other things we have to say, it was in our submission and listening to evidence this committee has heard over the recent times, there is a lot hyperbole about what the numbers are and are not. The reality is no-one really knows. When you are making management decisions, our view is it is critically important to know what you are dealing with in terms of quantity of numbers in terms of the species.

Mr JONES - I own a number of properties, have owned a number of properties in the central highlands and they have all had deer. My home property at Kempton is 4 000 acres. It has a resident population of about 50 deer. I know those deer go on to two of my neighbours' properties. If we were going to do a deer count I would have 50, my neighbour had 50 and the other neighbour had 50, so we have 150, but in real terms we only have 50.

You would probably have a copy of the departmental document over the last number of years on the counts. Tasmania is a difficult terrain to do that in. In Scotland they use helicopters and do a helicopter count. Scotland is only marginally larger than Tasmania. The year I was there the helicopter count resulted in excess of one million deer, but they have four different types of deer, whereas we only have one, the fallow deer. Fallow deer are not known to multiply like red deer or sika deer. That is a fact. Fallow deer can also move 20 kilometres a day in dry conditions and back to where they bedded down, so the count in Tasmania is very difficult to ascertain. As you will see in 2011, I think the count by the department involved was a lot more than it is today. We have been through drought years and things like that.

How you get an accurate assumption in Tasmania is very difficult. We have instant experts out there who say we've got them by the thousands, but how many have they counted the same time over? We do have deer in some areas that haven't been there before but I think you will find, if you track the history of those deer, they eventuated in other circumstances.

Mr GAFFNEY - That is fine, but we can track how many deer have been taken because they are tagged.

Mr JONES - That is correct.

Mr GAFFNEY - The university said if we are only taking out this many deer, and a doe can breed many fawns in their life cycle of the doe, then exponentially it can grow to a certain figure. While we might just go 50 plus 50 plus 50 is 150, using the theory that they use there is the growth of the numbers.

Mr SKILLERN - That's the point we're making - there may be, there may not be. Don's point about the fact that deer travel such distances makes a physical count difficult. However,

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some three years ago the department did an exercise - I think it was called the 'poo project' for a very good reason - whereby they collected the droppings of various animals and used DNA. That deals with this issue of counting twice or three times or whatever, because you actually identify an individual animal.

The other thing that came out of that project was not around deer, it was around other species, but I am saying that there is a template there that could be used. You can use the DNA to track how far an animal goes. You can even go to the extent of working out - from an environmental point this is important - what is in the diet of a particular animal. There are mechanisms but the bottom line is that it will require a significant investment of money. It is a matter of whether the state is doing that, if it has the capacity to do that. If the state does not, we have to rely on modelling. The problem is that modelling itself can be very controversial. We saw that in the university projection that says by 2050 there would be one million fallow deer in Tasmania.

Mr JONES - If you take 100 deer, unless you know the ratio of male to female, what the gestation period has been and things of that nature, you can't make those statements. You go through drought years and good years and it varies from animal to animal. If you take this year, I had one block of 2000 ewes and we went through a drought period. What do you think the block percentage of dry ewes were out of those 2000?

Ms RATTRAY - Around 50 per cent?

Mr JONES - No, there were 500 out of the 2000 that did not rear a lamb. You have all those variables. It is easy for somebody at the university to sit down and take A, B, C, add it all up and do it. It does not happen in practice.

Mr GAFFNEY - That is fine. We know there are some animals that will not produce an egg, will not come into oestrus, because of the conditions? Is a deer one of those animals?

Mr JONES - All animals shut down, wallabies and so forth. In prolific seasons they breed more; it is a known fact.

Mr GAFFNEY - Through the midlands now we have an irrigation system where there is a lot more feed around than there probably has ever been. Can't we assume from that that there is more feed available for deer through the midlands area, which is a known area for deer, that has not been there before?

Mr JONES - There is a lot more feed available, for sure. There is no doubt about that. I have centre-point irrigators myself. My deer population has not increased over my properties but I can tell you my possum and kangaroo population has gone through the roof. After the alternative to 1080 program did a study on my property, they worked out that in regard to kangaroo and possum, I was losing \$170 000 a year as part of that program. If you ask me where the problem is, possums and wallaby are my problem. My deer population is the same this year as it probably was four years ago, and the same on my other properties.

Mr GAFFNEY - Do you have hunting on your property?

Mr JONES - Yes, I do.

Mr GAFFNEY - So it's a managed property?

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Mr JONES - Yes - I hope I manage it.

Mr GAFFNEY - I mean you have the hunting fraternity that manages deer on your property.

Mr JONES - My employees are rabbit hunters.

Mr SKILLERN - Going back to your question about the modelling, there are two other elements that need to be given serious consideration to that. First, there seems to be a lack of understanding - and talking to the hunters, they seem to have a good handle on this - of the demise of the Tasmanian devil and what that has meant to the survival rates of fawns.

The other thing that needs to be taken on board is climate change and the impacts that is going to have on this state over the next 10 to 15 years. Whether we are talking deer or other species, there will be and we are already seeing changes in fisheries off the east coast because of the warming of the water there. We are going to see similar things happening where previous ranges may not be acceptable anymore and previous ranges that were not acceptable will become acceptable.

I am saying that to project out to 2050 is a pretty tall ask, given all the variables that play into this. Any modelling that doesn't take account of all these variables, which was Don's point, frankly, is open to question. We are saying let's get a benchmark to start from.

Going back to your point about tags, it's not a very accurate assessment of the outcomes because last year 4500 hunting tags were given out, of which only 800 were used. The reason the other 3700 were not used is because the hunters couldn't get access to different properties. There are other factors that play into that and it doesn't give you a genuine read of the populations. It will be costly, but if we are serious about getting a benchmark, a handle on the population base at the moment we can monitor that as we go forward to ensure the management regimes we have in place are doing what they need to do. At the moment, frankly, it is all a little grey.

Mr JONES - In the discussions with my committee on deer management, they agreed to the increase of the number of animals taken last year and the variation in the seasons. They didn't agree on changing anything else. They wanted to maintain the present crop protection permits as they are because their understanding was that it gave farmers better protection of their property and the management of it. Under the present crop protection permits I have I can ride out to my employee, I can cancel it, allow it for one week or allow it for five years. The TFGA will be advertising the availability of the new crop protection permits and things of that nature and how people best go about getting that.

Deer have been the subject of discussion in wildlife management for as long as I can remember. There are so many different variations to different farmers. There are some farmers who completely want to eradicate deer, full stop. There are other farmers who make a lot of money out of deer, no doubt about that. Then there are the farmers who are happy with the present crop protection permits that have been allowed for a 12-month extended period on deer and those things seem to be working well. On a majority we agree in that area.

Mr SKILLERN - That feeds into what Don opened with. That is the fact, we are a peak farming body. We have a broad constituency that is reflective of the broader community. We have farmers who, as Don alluded to, would love to see deer declared feral and eradicated through

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to farmers who, as part of their farm income, make reasonable money out of opening up to shooters and we have everybody that sits in between.

Last year being a drought year it was particularly difficult. This reached a bit of a peak. It goes back to your comment, Michael, about the fact that we have pivot irrigators and so on, and feed being scarce - it was not only deer, it was possums and wallabies gravitating to wherever they could find it. What we have attempted to do here in conjunction with the hunters is find a middle ground. It does not make either end of that spectrum completely comfortable but we believe as an organisation we have reached a point where we can move forward. All of these things are under constant review, as they naturally should be. I stress the point that we really need to have some solid benchmarking information. You need to know that whatever management regime is in place, you can have accountability around it and work out whether it is working or not. Arguably, the same applies to other species, particularly feral cats, for example.

Mr MULDER - You seem to be concerned we should continue to regulate it and we should not be taking too many deer.

Mr JONES - I never said we should not be taking too many. We aim to keep it regulated. Under the present regulations a person with deer on their premises, or they have a head to be used for trophy purposes, it must be accompanied by a tag. Therefore, there is control of it. If you are in possession of a deer and it is not tagged, obviously it has been poached, you have broken the law or you have been trespassing on a farmer's property. That is why farmers want to keep control of the situation. The best way, proven over time, is with the existing crop protection permits.

Mr MULDER - Would it be a problem if we over-culled? This committee will have great difficulty working out how many deer are out there. We are sure there is one, but the range then is from there to a million. We are not sure how we are going to work out where that number falls.

Mr JONES - That is the difficult problem you have. The numbers have probably been, in some cases, exaggerated. Whether or not they are a correct balance, I can only advocate on deer over my properties. In the last 10 years, deer over my properties in have not multiplied in number. My multiplications have come in other areas. They have not come in the deer population.

Mr MULDER - Getting back to my question, some people think there are far too many, other people think there is enough and it should be okay. What damage would there be if we happened to say in case there are too many, we will do some over cull at the moment and see what that does? They are an invasive species, in the end. If we over culled them and they disappeared, would that be a problem?

Mr JONES - That is difficult to answer. It is a personal opinion that my committee would probably not go along with it. They are happy with the status quo at the moment. There are others. You have the same ones that culled. We have got farmers who want to sell deer, kill them and sell them. We have others that oppose it. You have a varied sort of thing.

Mr MULDER - What would be the harm if we, regulated or not, opened the bag limit? Maybe, as we heard from the commercial processor, he can take a lot more deer. What would be the harm if, for example, we found you are right and the scientists are wrong and the population

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suddenly started to collapse after over culling. What would be the consequences, given it is an invasive species?

Mr JONES - For a start, you cannot go into an open cull without the support of the farming community. Otherwise, you will be trespassing. That is point number one. The other thing is, you are talking about the game meats and things like that. In one of the situations, if you go into supermarkets and look at the wallaby, most of it is coming from South Australia. If you go down to Sandy Bay and look at their supermarkets, it is all coming from South Australia. To get a game harvesting licence in Tasmania, and which the TFGA have interviewed, there is only one person who issues a gaming harvesting licence in this state, under the administration of TAFE. The current game harvesting licence fee is \$1460, I have been told, way outside the approach of normal hunting people who come onto our property. There are kangaroo and possum going to sheer waste. In Scotland, the government runs courses on meat hygiene and how to take part in it. I have people approach me to say what can you do about it? That is the thing. It is a big scenario there. The TFGA would like to see something done in that interest, because it is completely and utterly out of the realms of the majority of the hunting fraternity.

Mr MULDER - I will ask it in a slightly different way, what would be the economic impact on the farming community if we over cull deer and the population fell below critical mass? I know about permits and trespassing, but if we took the people who say there are far too many and there could be one million at their word, as we are required with you, Don, we take you at your word. The committee is stuck with some scientific extrapolations and some anecdotal assessments. If we decided we were going to extend the take in order to reduce the population and it was discovered you were right and the population fell below a critical mass, what would be the economic harm?

Mr SKILLERN - I think the answer to that is we are probably already there, at this point. We discuss the crop protection permits with hunters. As I said before, we have a diverse range of views within our organisation. There is a significant body of farmers who want to eradicate deer from their properties. The opening up of the crop protection permit would facilitate that. In response to your question, for many farmers who have that view, they would be completely comfortable with it. They would argue, I would think, that there would be a positive economic outcome for them.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are farmers, as Don alluded to before, who make a living out of having hunters on their property who would have a different view about that. I think that is, in short, the best and simple answer.

The other thing I must clarify is that my board is very, very clear at this point in time they do not support field-shot game. There are some good, substantial reasons.

Mr MULDER - That is deer we are talking about, not kangaroo or wallaby?

Mr SKILLERN - That is the deer, not kangaroo or possum. The issue they have considered is field-shot game for deer and they do not support it at this time. That view may change in future, but as we sit here today, that is the situation.

Mr MULDER - I am not calling you a liar any more than I am calling anyone else a liar, I am simply saying that if we took their view and we increased the cull in order to 'deal with the

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rising populations', would it be such a bad thing if they were wrong and the population went below critical mass? I think that is the simple point.

Mr SKILLERN - That is a good question.

Mr MULDER - Sure, it has impact on recreational shooters, but beyond that -

Mr JONES - One of the things I must point out about the recreational shooters is the farming community is very reliant on recreational shooters to take care of feral cats, wallaby and possum.

Ms RATTRAY - They do the fences, they pick up stones, they do a lot of things.

Mr JONES - They do all of that. If you take away the incentive for them and say you are going to cull all your deer, we are back in big trouble. We are going to lose something we have been enjoying. I do not care what the university is saying. In the last 40 years on my properties I can't show you that I've had a dramatic increase in my deer population. There may be some places in Tasmania that have and there are undoubtedly places in Tasmania where deer have not been before, but those places don't have large numbers of deer. I was down at Dover the other day and there is a small parcel of deer there, they informed me, but probably only eight or 10. Some north-eastern parts of the state may have had an increase but it is hard to determine what the number are. You can argue all day long. You can't say there is or will be a huge increase in deer unless you've got a viable study done that can give you those things. The department studies over the years have done grid references but suddenly they're not good enough. They have been fairly static but suddenly it seems that nobody wants to believe those grid references and studies that were done, so where do you go? You have these people who go out and spotlight and do grid references and spend all this time and government money to do this and suddenly we've got a beautiful idea that we are going to have a million fallow deer.

CHAIR - That wasn't the department; it was from the university.

Mr JONES - I understand that, and that has been refuted time and time again. Their study was discussed by my committee and they laughed at it.

Mr MULDER - I am just trying to sum up and get the guts of it as to the impact. If we fell below critical mass in the deer population, from what you're saying the farming lobby would lose some of that cheap labour that you get to cut the wood and do all those sorts of things, but you would also anticipate an explosion in the native population which would then cause you more problems than grazing deer do.

Mr JONES - Yes, definitely .

Mr GAFFNEY - Don, when you ask for a permit for crop protection, are you required to give the number of deer you shoot under that permit?

Mr JONES - No. If you've got a lot of deer you could ask for 100 tags. You issue them to the employees, they shoot the deer and you tag them.

Mr GAFFNEY - DPIPWE has said that in 2015 there were 4975 deer harvested but there could have been 9584 because that is how many tags were given out.

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Mr JONES - That means the deer weren't where the shooters were.

Mr GAFFNEY - With the crop permits they authorised that 13 000 deer could have been shot in 2015 but they don't give us a number of how many actually were shot. My question is if you ask for a crop protection permit, are you required to return to DPIPWE how many deer you shoot?

Mr JONES - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - So they should be able to give us that number.

Mr JONES - Yes - that applies to possums, wallaby and deer. A lot of farmers would say, 'I've got a lot of deer, I want 100 permits', and they issue them to their recreational shooters. They might only shoot half of them but the farmer is being on the safe side and gets sufficient in case he needs them. That's the way it has worked, so you are not getting five and then the next week ring up and want five more. Under the crop protection permits a farmer can utilise the tags to his advantage and how he wants to do it.

Mr GAFFNEY - That's not a problem; I just wanted to know that they have to report it.

Mr JONES - You have to record them.

Mr FARRELL - Peter, could you expand a little on your board's objection to wild harvested deer? Is that mainly to protect the people who farm deer or are there health concerns?

Mr SKILLERN - There are a number of issues. First of all, we also have deer farmers who are members and they operate a business so the board is cognisant of that. We have had representations that suggest there are some difficulties around doing it anyway. Primarily, the board has the view that if you do this for deer, in many respects, where do you stop? Do you start with deer and then perhaps do it with cattle and sheep? Also, what stops a farmers from saying, 'Okay, I'll slaughter my own sheep and put it into the market', or their own beef or whatever it might be? The board has taken a very strong view. Don's committee has a different view about that but at this time that is TFGA policy. Whilst the board is very possibly going to review that in a short time, whether they change their minds or not, we will wait and see. At this point that is the position.

Ms RATTRAY - Short time means how long?

Mr SKILLERN - Probably in the next four or five weeks.

CHAIR - Peter, you also did not support the extension of the season.

Mr SKILLERN - No. We were saying to continue the hunting regime as it is, with the exception of opening up state reserves under a very strict regime so that recreational hunters can go in there and help deal with those issues. It goes back to Tony's point about eradicating it. In many ways, that is an easier ask if you do it on a geographical basis. I note some of the conservations groups have issued a map with a line on it suggesting everything west of that line should perhaps be eradicated. That is certainly one way of doing it. The other thing with recreational hunters that needs to be recognised is that, while the state coffers are as they are

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currently, recreational hunters are a very inexpensive resource the state and we, as farmers, can use. I argue that should not be overlooked either.

Mr JONES - One of the things you are talking about is meat harvesting. Throughout Europe meat that is classified as field-shot game. It is not intermixed with farm animals. It is specifically categorised as that so a person buying it knows explicitly what they are buying and under what conditions. If you look at some of the criteria of what the Scottish National Heritage people have done, they specifically specify the things and the government does that, which here they do not .

CHAIR - Thanks once again for your time today.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

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Mr MICHAL FRYDRYCH, SPRINGFIELD DEER FARM, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Armstrong) - Welcome to the public hearing today. All evidence given in this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee website when it becomes available.

Mr FRYDRYCH - We bought a farm four years ago. It has been in action for a total of 26 years, so it has been there for a long time and it always was a deer farm. As far as deer farming is concerned it is probably one of the older ones in the area, not the eldest, but one of the older ones. We have our own abattoir and I was surprised to hear there are no farms in Tasmania with their own abattoir. We process our own meat. We have a qualified meat inspector on site, which for about \$2 000 is also a two-year TAFE course. So it is not as much as sending somebody to TAFE for two days, buy him a ute and send him into the wilderness. It does not work that way.

We did not think it was appropriate to bring the sausages, but we also have produce and we have it done by local butchers. We have also won lots of gold medals. We also supply to what is known as the best boutique hotel in the world. I will not name them, but the casino takes from us, and so on. I am not saying that show off but to put us on the same level with others who seem to think they are the best in Tasmania.

Having said that, we also use everything from the deer apart from the bones. We do not charge for them. We give them to the Trowunna Wildlife Park as donations for the animals, for the Devils' program and so on. Local farmers also really appreciate it because when you have six or eight sheep dogs it takes a lot of meat to feed them. That is the background to the farm.

We also run a B&B, which is quite important. You might have noticed the centre page of the Qantas in-flight magazine has the Springfield Deer Farm on it. We invite chefs from all over Australia to come to the farm to show them venison and teach them how to cook venison. A lot of them, you would be surprised, are not quite au fait with that sort of thing. We do all that. Promotional, tourist-wise and people love to stay on the deer farm. That is us in a nutshell.

I thought the presentation from TFGA was very good. I fully support this being done region by region. In Mole Creek, for instance, I see a decrease in the wild population. When we first took over the farm we had deer trying to get in during the rutting season because all the girls were inside. Now we do not see them. Last season, the two farmers who adjoin either side of our farm brought their tags and could not fulfil them because they could not find any deer on their farms. They had to come and buy deer meat from us. I swapped it for some roadwork, which was more appropriate.

I think that shows that you cannot just make one brush with Tasmania and that is it. Before we start making rules we should go back. Exponential accounting, that is, the UTAS thing. I spent 30 years doing presentations and using future values of money and stuff like that. So, yes, if you want to justify something you will. I would be very careful and I fully support -

Ms RATTRAY - I do it when I buy something.

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Mr FRYDRYCH - The TFGA have been talking about quality of meat, I think one has to be practical with these things. You go hunting with the ute; have you ever tried it in Tasmania? It might be okay down here where everything is flat. Come to Mole Creek and show me how you are going to go with the ute up in the bush, shoot something 300 yards away. You have to find it, because it normally does not fall where you think it has fallen, gut it - sorry to be so gory but you do all the bad stuff - and take it back to the ute somehow in a good condition. I reject that outright.

I have not seen a deer on the road, thank God, but I have seen a lot of wallabies in our area. When you go to Jackeys Marsh, do yourself a favour and go there after 7 p.m. in winter. You will not go faster than 20 kilometres an hour because there are wallabies everywhere. As I say, I do not see that as an issue. Some fencing damage to farms is possible overall. The larger deer will clear four-foot fences like there is no fence. They really do not have to go under a four-foot fence, they will happily jump over it. What I am saying is to be a little more hands on, rather than making a submission for my own interests only.

Some of the things written say that management inside the shed is really stressful. It is completely the opposite. The sheds on the deer farm are dark, and deer in the dark are quiet. That is why you put them in a shed pre-death. To say that you shunt them in a shed and they go wild, like any animal that does not want to be somewhere, they will go backwards. Once they are in the shed, and if you leave them there for a while, you can happily walk amongst them. They quieten down. That is the whole process.

The authorities inspect our farm. We have to slaughter in front of them. They take swabs. The usual, like any other process. To say that there is no deer - the gentleman who said it, and I think that is what upset me the most - in four years we have been approached once, only to have the order cancelled the night before. The guy said, 'I am not dealing with that, we focus on hotels', and that sort of thing. What do most restaurants basically need? They need continuity of a good product week after week. They have got it on the menu and it has to be the same quality and quantity. We had a case with the casino when they changed supplier. The buyer was almost hanged by the chefs because of the quality that all of a sudden appeared. They do not have time to go and select bits of meat. They want the proper stuff, and so on.

I think they are the very day-to-day issues. The market is over-supplied. Again, when you were listening to those conversations the red deer was struggling and this was struggling - we are talking about fallow deer. We are talking what we have here and it is not the same meat. I do not care what anybody says about people hunting and eating the meat afterwards. Would you eat 12-year-old sheep or seven-year-old goat?

Ms RATTRAY - I am a farm girl; I would have had to.

Mr FRYDRYCH - You know what I am saying. It certainly was not a pleasure unless you make some sausages out of it, if you are lucky. I could hear the gentleman's point about being disappointed, but I am not really. What we need in the industry is clarity, where we are going with it after all the investment. I need to do some work. I have stopped because I am waiting for what is going to happen. We spent our life savings buying the farm, so I don't want to go back to work at my age. I am working 24/7, or 12/7 at least. It is different work though, so it is quite fine.

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What we need is long-term clarity on what we have. What we need is what I call the roadkill from elsewhere being brought in and used here when we have farmers here who are a lot bigger than we are and can supply it. It's a matter of business. You can either buy rubbish from the mainland or buy good stuff here. In my opinion there are probably 2500 deer available now in Tasmania, so why are we bringing stuff in? It's because it is cheap. As you know, New Zealand has gone for the red deer, but they went there because of the velvet so I am sure they have a little old stock. This is hearsay. I am not saying that's what is happening, it is my opinion on that.

We really need some good rules. We certainly don't want to see people selling venison on the side of the road that they shot the night before. As I keep saying, would you buy a crayfish in a car park? It is the same sort of scenario. Really, that's it. We need to promote the industry, which we are trying to do in our small scale. It is a healthy food, it is good food. TV is blaring at us every day about how we should be reducing fats and God knows what - except now we're breathing it all back in.

We need support from the government for the deer farmers to produce what we can produce. The situation is pretty good. Since I arrived in Tasmania we have gone through two of the worst winters, we had drought, fires and floods, to the point where the Mole Creek community was blaming me for it. It is an issue, but we survived. We won't have a lot more fawns this year, because that was related to the grass last year. To say that all of a sudden there will be a boom in the next three weeks, I don't believe that.

I support extension of the hunting season. We need to go pre-rutting season, because why let them breed if you're going to shoot them afterwards? I would go to pre-breeding season and focus on the females - sorry to say that.

Mr MULDER - We're all for shooting females - we see that as much more effective population control.

CHAIR - You said you had stopped investment until after this inquiry.

Mr FRYDRYCH - Yes. There are certain things you have to do but the place is running pretty well. We just had a very nice report back on our last inspection, so I am satisfied but I would like to do more. But would you if you were in my place?

CHAIR - Hopefully this inquiry -

Mr FRYDRYCH - This inquiry hopefully will put it - then we go for it, yeah.

Ms RATTRAY - Can you grow the farm bigger, have more stock? Do you have that capacity?

Mr FRYDRYCH - I would love to buy the farm next door because it has trees on it, but I have the Gunns issue to deal with, the timber issue - they're still trying to figure that one out. But yes, I would love to, because the potential is there - there are no two ways about it.

Ms RATTRAY - We also heard that the harvesting of deer is quite a specialised area. Would you support that?

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Mr FRYDRYCH - Yes. I couldn't bring the sausages here but you are more than welcome to come to the farm and we will put a deer on the spit, but the whole point is that it should be stress-free, like any animal. I am not a butcher or a meat scientist - I have looked up what a meat scientist does, and it is not really related to deer at all, it is meat composition and nutritional values. That is basically what Dr Google said.

Being a smaller unit, everything is done by enhancement, everything is done by walking. When I first arrived they had a quad bike they used to use. I do everything on foot - literally walk them into the paddock, walk them into the dark room and there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Ms RATTRAY - You don't harvest every day?

Mr FRYDRYCH - No. We probably do seven to eight a week. Farmers are phoning me daily, but Tasmania has an issue. We started an alpaca industry but had nowhere to slaughter. We had rabbits but nowhere to slaughter them. We are protecting everything that seems to be running and ruining the farms. When we introduce species, the red perch is the latest, I believe, and the kookaburra is an introduced species, so where are we going with that one? We have a lot of those issues but I don't want to be a butcher, it is not what I bought the farm for. We could definitely increase or hire. We have a meat inspector on the premises so there is absolutely no issue with our capacity. It is small but it is quite good.

Ms RATTRAY - Another one to visit.

Mr FRYDRYCH - It is Mole Creek - paradise.

Mr MULDER - Some questions about supply and demand. You said you want to grow the business but you do not want field-shot game, you only want farm-grown game.

Mr FRYDRYCH - I would prefer to.

Mr MULDER - That is your preference. We heard before that field-shot game, if treated and bled properly, gets over some of the issues of the meat shock. What demand is there for your product and to what extent do you think it could grow? Would there come a point where your business could be partly field-shot game and partly paddock game?

Mr FRYDRYCH - Everybody talks about field-shot game. They would all like to tell you they can shoot a deer through the head at 300 metres, but show me one of them. I'm a reasonable shot and have been shooting all my life and I'm pretty selective at what I do. If you go field shooting, you can probably get one a night, maybe if you are lucky you get two, to do it correctly. Any hit on the shoulder means half the carcass is gone. Remember also that fallow deer, especially the doe, is a very small animal. Meat-wise it's probably the same as a big kangaroo. I believe that eight out of 10 accidents involving hitting animals are wallabies. The percentage speaks for itself.

We have an association and can phone each other but my preference would be to bring the deer in live from somebody who does not have an abattoir and leave them in a separate paddock for a few months. One of the reasons we are doing quite well and part of our promotion is that our grass in the Meander Valley is special. We have a very high-quality grass.

Mr MULDER - That's what the people at Jackeys March say.

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Mr FRYDRYCH - It is the same area.

Mr MULDER - What demand is out there? How big do you think the Tasmanian venison market could be?

Mr FRYDRYCH - For local?

Mr MULDER - No, for venison sourced in Tasmania, including exports.

Mr FRYDRYCH - I was surprised to hear there were \$300 000 worth of deer every second month because that represents 2000 fallow deer. I am not sure where 2000 fallow deer disappear into Tasmania. I would need to see that, to suss it out -

Mr MULDER - That is the recreational hunter's take, isn't it?

Mr FRYDRYCH - No, that's what they bring in. When you work out those figures, maybe you can do it one month a year but not every month. One of the issues is education because a lot of people only know back-strap and that's it. Everybody will tell you that you have to have back-strap but I think it's the most overrated piece of meat on the carcass. I believe it is growing but what we cannot afford is to start feeding people rubbish so that they tell you, 'I have tasted it and I didn't like it'. We have to keep our standard at the top and be assured that everybody else is doing the same thing. You know who the dealers are. I get butchers asking me for 10 kilos of trim and they make 80 kilos of venison out of it. You know where those things are buried that you guys were digging for previously. We need more control, to see it is correctly shot and it is from a registered area.

CHAIR - One of the previous presenters said they source their deer from South Australia -

Mr FRYDRYCH - Correct.

CHAIR - Here in Tasmania you are virtually the only registered abattoir for deer, or the only deer farmer with an abattoir. If they want to source deer from anywhere else and they have to go to an abattoir, they have to be travelled and it stresses them out. If they went to an abattoir and were kept in a paddock for a little while, or put in the dark, would it eliminate the issue they are talking about?

Mr FRYDRYCH - A lot of people were fed up with this deer farming issue, the imports and that sort of thing. A lot of people do not know what to do. We bought deer to help people and that is exactly what we did. We put them into a separate paddock for four months. I wanted to make sure everything is healthy and whatever. They all put on weight on our grass and then we put them through the process.

CHAIR - The previous presenter is saying you have to shoot them in the wild because once you start transporting them it ruins the product.

Mr FRYDRYCH - To catch a wild deer is not an easy thing. You would have to do as they do in South Africa with those sorts of things -

CHAIR - I mean about other farm deer.

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Mr FRYDRYCH - Yes. It is not a problem.

CHAIR - It is not a problem to be able to harvest those?

Mr FRYDRYCH - We have done it a number of times.

CHAIR - You bring them in from other farms now?

Mr FRYDRYCH - Farmers farm, they want to sell some deer, they put them on the truck, somebody mentioned it, they are dark, enclosed -

Ms RATTRAY - And a box thing?

Mr FRYDRYCH - He is talking about a shooting box, which is basically the final stage. The box is very narrow and you have a slot. That is what they were referring to in that case. Yes, it can be done.

CHAIR - Thank you for your submission and for your time in particular.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

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Mr SIMON COOK, FORICO PTY LTD, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Armstrong) - Welcome to the public hearing today. All evidence given in this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee website when it becomes available.

Mr COOK - The key components of the Forico submission is protecting the forest asset that Forico manage here in Tasmania. As a start, I will probably give you a brief overview of the Forico business. We currently manage 181 000 hectares of land in Tasmania, predominantly in the northern half of the state. Of that, 1000 000 hectares is plantation and about 80 000 hectares is native, natural forest, which we manage for conservation and biodiversity values.

In terms of the forest asset we manage on behalf of our investors, we comply with FSC AFS certification responsibilities. As part of those sustainable forest management requirements we have to manage the assets from an economic, environmental and a social standpoint. I guess this current legislative review in terms of fallow deer legislation covers those aspects from an economic, environmental and probably more so from a social perspective. There is a vast array of opinions.

Having said that, we have significant fallow deer numbers in areas throughout our asset, predominantly in Barrington, Waratah, Riana, Blessington, Fingal, Campbell Town, Lake Leake, the Central Highlands and the Western Tiers. In terms of the current control available to us, which I guess we are reviewing today, we have a wildlife management plan that covers off all the species we lethally harvest in terms of Bennett's wallabies and pademelon - and deer.

In terms of the assets we manage, the key part of the rotation is at establishment. We generally establish the plantation trees at the most appropriate time of year, in spring. We do not always adopt lethal control measures. We look at alternatives; fencing and using netting around seedlings in sensitive areas so we encourage the growth and vitality of the trees and the newly established seedlings. That is not purely and predominantly focussed on plantation trees. From a conservation biodiversity standpoint, we do a lot of revegetation, conservation, biodiversity, and value enhancement in the native forest areas. We have problems with those trees being attacked and targeted by a wide variety of game, including deer.

Moving on, specifically in terms of the fallow deer in Tasmania, we, as Forico, support the maintenance of sustainable populations of endemic flora in Tasmania. Fallow deer are introduced. The maintenance of their broad protection status supports a small sector of the Tasmanian community and compromises other significant crop production and commercial values. I am not purely focussed on being a plantation forest manager, but there are agricultural interests, farmers who are equally significantly impacted as us. A key part of our engagement as a large forest management company is with our immediate neighbours, the broader community and feedback from them in terms of keeping and maintaining fallow deer numbers is significant. It forms part of the integrated control measures of our wildlife management plan.

We also support an appropriately regulated wildlife meat processing industry in Tasmania. We respect the premise that deer hunting is a valid recreational component of the Tasmanian community. Landowners have the right to manage their land and sustain populations at their

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disposal. The problem with fallow deer specifically is that they are not restricted to one particular tenure or one particular title. Under our wildlife management plan we have a permit to shoot fallow deer and are issued with tags accordingly, but certainly we have found that the number of deer we shoot doesn't correlate with the number of deer out there in the landscape. I guess our feeling is that there needs to be a more coordinated approach at a regional level, so not specifically Forico managing our assets and having our wildlife management plan to manage the deer populations in that area, but more collaboration. We do that with a number of other activities on the land that we manage - for example, with noxious weed management. It is more of a holistic catchment level approach and I see these synergies in terms of managing fallow deer numbers as well because they're predominantly a migratory species that moves across the landscape. For the areas I indicated where Forico has significant deer pressures there could be opportunities to target those low-hanging fruit as a start and have DPIPWE coordinate that from a cross-tenure management purpose.

In terms of the current impacts on the Forico assets, last financial year we spent \$450 000 on game control. Obviously that is not specifically targeted at the fallow deer but covers the spectrum of animals we target include wallabies and pademelons. As a specific example, at the Blessington Valley we had a 165-hectare plantation which we had to completely re-establish 12 months after it had been planted due to complete devastation from fallow deer. The cost of the reestablishment was \$135 000 and we have lost a year's potential growth which in current value would probably be about \$80 000 worth of revenue for Forico investors. I guess it is not specifically about Forico. We have investors, we have neighbours and the broader community to manage. There are other impacts. It is not just that establishment but in targeted areas the growth potential might be varied and compromised as a consequence of the initial impact, so we might not get the quality and quantity of product at the end of the rotation when we harvest. There are a number of flow-on effects that could potentially impact the revenue stream for Forico.

To summarise, the opportunities I wrote down in my submission were that we believe ideally there would be a complete deregulation of legislation associated with fallow deer in Tasmania, a removal of the barriers to restrict the marketing of wild deer meat products, and delegation of the fallow deer management from state legislation to the property owner under the auspices of a wildlife management plan. That would be the ideal scenario but to address and consider all the varied parties involved in the debate, I feel there should be a more regional and cross-tenure approach to address the problem. Unfortunately there needs to be clarity because the current regulations as they sit for a primary producer and a manager growing a crop regulations are not effective. That is the Forico submission in a nutshell.

Mr MULDER - I know Forico is completely plantation based. What sort of damage does the deer do to your seedlings and things?

Mr COOK - They can complete defoliate the young seedlings them.

Mr MULDER - So they strip the leaves?

Mr COOK - They strip the leaves and depending how palatable the stems are, they can chew right down to the base of the tree, causing complete mortality. It is not just isolated trees in targeted areas but also as the trees get older, marking territories they debark the trees causing that mid-rotation growth impact as well. It is not purely restricted to the time of establishment.

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Mr MULDER - We heard evidence a short while ago that basically the deer are only restricting themselves to European grasses. You would not agree with that by the sound of it?

Mr COOK - I wasn't here to witness that but certainly we have evidence and we have an issue.

Mr MULDER - You don't have too much in the way of European grasses you are trying to protect?

Mr COOK - No. It would be good if they were only targeting European grasses. We would not have had to spend \$135 000 reestablishing plantation areas.

Ms RATTRAY - With your management, do you have recreational shooters come? Do you have any of those groups established?

Mr COOK - Yes. Under our wildlife management plan predominantly we have professional hunters who we employ directly to target the game.

Ms RATTRAY - Hence the significant cost.

Mr COOK - Yes, that is right. Also we have recreational hunters. In targeted areas where there are problems with fallow deer we have set up hunting groups which are permitted to access three geographic locations within the Forico estate. That comes with a cost internally to manage that. Also we have health and safety ramifications in terms of who is allowed access to the Forico estate. We have to manage that internally. We have a combination but generally the shift is more on the professional shooters because we employ them to maintain the numbers in and around those newly established areas and areas that are to be established.

CHAIR - Is it under a cage system?

Mr COOK - Yes. We have gone down the pathway of having our wildlife management plan for the entire Forico estate and we get permits to target wallabies, pademelons and deer. We get tags issued by DPIPW during the course of a year to target all those species. We provide those numbers to DPIPW as a requirement of the wildlife management plan so they can correlate and collate all the figures from all the landowners who have wildlife management plans.

Ms RATTRAY - You are saying the professional shooters are more effective than the recreational visitors to your property so that is why you prefer to go down that path?

Mr COOK - It is more of a financial decision. We are investing a lot of money in putting the trees in the ground and we want to ensure the people we have out there protecting that asset are qualified and do it professionally. That is not to say the recreational hunters do not have a place. For example in Surrey Hills we have some very significant highland grassland areas and we have recreational shooters, whom we do not employ, acting in those areas to keep the game numbers under control. There is an opportunity but specifically focusing on the areas we establish on an annual basis we employ professional hunters to do that task.

Mr GAFFNEY - When they kill the game, do your professional hunters supply anybody with that meat that you know of?

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Mr COOK - Not that we know of. There is no regulated opportunity for them to do that. It is like any other game; it is shot on sight.

Ms RATTRAY - They take what they can eat and leave the rest.

Mr COOK - That is right. If there was an opportunity to market that, from an economic and a social capacity, then there could potentially be opportunities to find another income stream for those hunters, the processors, and for us as a land manager as well.

Mr GAFFNEY - You have never spoken with the Lenah Game Meats people?

Mr COOK - Not that I am aware of, but there are other employees within the business who they may have communicated with.

CHAIR - We have heard that the recreational shooters are queuing up for property to shoot on -

Ms RATTRAY - And they pay money and they do work.

CHAIR - Have you ever thought of talking to them as an organisation? They are queuing up for properties to shoot on. It would be a lot cheaper for you, as an organisation, and they are very responsible people. It confuses me why you do not -

Mr COOK - I guess there is that opportunity. We have targeted key regional areas in the Forico estate where we do permit access to hunters, so it is not as if it does not happen. That is an internal decision we have to make. We have a freehold land access that we have to manage. We have to manage it appropriately. If we start allowing recreational hunters throughout that 180 000 hectares, rather than the component of the asset that recreational hunters do access at the moment, then that will come at an internal cost and we would have to resource that capacity.

CHAIR - Wouldn't your internal costs for that - it is your business I know - compared to the cost you are paying now - what was it?

Ms RATTRAY - \$450 000 a year for game management.

Mr COOK - That is right, but that is a decision that Forico elected to make - how we manage the land, how we target our game. But there is that opportunity. That does not answer the question of the fallow deer management in Tasmania and how it should be legislated. Do the numbers get targeted professionally or recreationally? That is the flow-on effect of our discussions.

Mr FARRELL - Shooting is your main method of control?

Mr COOK - No, we do have alternative treatments. We do boundary fencing with neighbours. We identify sensitive areas - for example, little narrow fingers which we are re-establishing the plantation on. We put little nets around the trees to protect them from being defoliated by deer and other game. It is not as if we have just one tool in the kitbag. We look at alternatives. At the time of establishment we apply a controlled-release fertiliser at the seedling to encourage early growth, so if a tree is targeted it has every chance of recovering, rather than mortality.

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CHAIR - You would not be able to put a percentage on what is being damaged by fallow deer compared to all other browsing animals?

Ms RATTRAY - No, you would not know who was doing the damage.

Mr COOK - That is right. In terms of numbers, we have shooters - professional and recreational - who are out hunting on the Forico asset. They may see a large herd of deer and they can target one deer. Once that is shot, the remainder go onto an adjacent landowner's property, who may well have a wildlife management plan as well. Unfortunately we cannot jump over the fence. Hence my approach that there could potentially be synergies with adjacent landowners and have a more regional, collective, collaborative approach.

Mr GAFFNEY - Obviously some of your land borders national park or crown land. Do you have a good relationship with DPIPWE and Parks?

Mr COOK - Yes, as with a lot of different landowners you would like to say it is not our problem; it is yours. Game migrates across the landscape. We have a good relationships with all our neighbours - Parks, state forest, immediate neighbours who might have agricultural crops. We try to consult and engage openly and transparently with them to achieve the best outcome, whether for deer control, game management or noxious weed control. It is more about working with our neighbours.

Mr MULDER - As a young country lad whose family did not have a fridge, we used to live on wallaby and roo. We could tell when wallaby had been taken off the field compared to when it had been taken out in the bush somewhere, because the eucalypt taste was very strong. Have you had any similar feedback from your deer shooters to say the deer has a really strong flavour because they have been grazing on eucalypt rather than grass?

Mr COOK - I would not know the answer to that.

Mr MULDER - If it was you would probably have some feedback.

Mr COOK - I guess a young eucalypt seedling is very succulent, very palatable and an easy food source for any game.

Mr MULDER - Very aromatic.

Mr COOK - That is right. Going back to Craig's earlier question about alternative mechanisms, we are looking at using sprays at the moment in the high risk areas to apply over the trees to make them less appealing for deer so we can encourage that early growth and get over that sensitive period where they are susceptible.

Mr MULDER - Do you find them deep inside your grown forests or only on your seedlings and saplings?

Mr COOK - It depends on the site. The Forico estate is wide and varied. There are a number of plantations that were established on ex-agricultural land. It provides a good throughfare for game. Also, there might be some very steep hilly areas and the game is confined to the boundaries. You may have an area of native forest immediately adjacent to it, which could

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harbour the population when you have a professional hunter out there looking to control the numbers.

CHAIR - Simon, thanks very much for your submission and making yourself available.

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Mr ANTHONY ARCHER WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Welcome, Anthony, to the public hearing today. All evidence given in this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee website when it becomes available.

Mr ARCHER - First of all I thank you very much for the opportunity to address you. It is very important to our business. I have been involved in a number of the submissions you received. One of them is the one in my own name. Another has been as chair of the Deer Farmers Council and I had some input as a Deer Farmers Council rep in the TFGA submissions as well. I have been quite pleased at hearing the quality of the submissions. I have managed to hear most of them and the depth and quality of the submissions I think has been commendable.

Ms RATTRAY - We agree. We have been very impressed by what we have heard and seen.

Mr ARCHER - I think there is a large consensus that I would like to discuss with you once I have touched on a few other issues that seem to have emerged from what I have heard over the last few days. I am wearing a number of hats. In my own case, I have been involved with deer behind wire since 1972. We were one of the five initial deer farm licences issued. We were by chance issued with number one which I hold very dear, but unfortunately it was not based on merit. We have been involved right since the industry's inception. In 1978 I was involved in all the discussions that set up the deer industry so I have a good corporate memory of all the negotiations that occurred between farmers, deer farmers and the Crown over that period. If there are any questions that you may have I am happy to touch on any of those issues that might be of help.

The industry in Tasmania has a lot to be proud of. We were handling fallow deer before the New Zealanders. We did artificial insemination in fallow deer as a world-first. Members of our association have been the first in the world to access Mesopotamian genetics. In my own case we paid a world record price back in the 1980s to access Mesopotamian genetics when the only place in the world we have not been able to use it is Tasmania. As a family business, that sticks in our neck, as you can imagine. We have experienced a number of ups and downs. We are in the bottom of a trough at the moment as an industry. I am hoping we will be starting to climb our way out of it pretty soon but we have certainly had a very difficult and turbulent time over the last few years.

The industry at the moment, as Michal Frydrych, one of the abattoir operators, pointed out, is in a state of uncertainty. This committee has created uncertainty.

CHAIR - We certainly did not intend that.

Mr ARCHER - Well, there has been a consequence and there is a lot of uncertainty, particularly in the meat market, that there may be cheaper, wild-shot venison available and if we hang off, that could be an option for the future. That has led to uncertainty and some concerns for us.

I would like to touch on some of the myths that have been portrayed over the last few days. Some of the things I would like to answer, but I will give you a little bit of science first to give

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some clarity to some of the questions that the committee have been asked or have asked and have not been given answers to. Fallow deer are very subject to body weight in regard to their fertility and the success of a fawn's survival. If a doe weighs 35 kilograms on our farm we can expect the fawn to weigh roughly 10 per cent of her weight. If the fawn weighs less than that you will get large, very significant mortalities. There are key production parameters as farmers we need to hit. One of them is fertility, like any farm animal. We really need them to be above that crucial 35 kilograms when they are mated and that will give us a high fawn survival.

The larger fawn by nature are males, the same as in any other species. If you get high fawn mortality, it is the females that die. That is reflected in the wild population. If you ask yourself why in these difficult years the deer numbers do not just go backwards but go backwards significantly, it's because the female fawns are unable to survive in those dry periods. Obviously the ones that survive are much more likely to be the male fawns. There are a lot of parameters like that that I might be able to give you some assistance with in terms of basic scientific information. We have a long history that we have to know to run a successful farming venue.

My own stock originally came from parks and zoos. I purchased my animals from the Punchbowl Zoo in Launceston, the Woodville Zoo that used to be at Granton, and we have accessed them from Smithton and all over the state. What we did as a typical farm enterprise was take them into our farm, weigh them, assess them and look for different genetics in them. The whole deer farm has to be irrigated to meet our production targets. Fencing is expensive so you need a large stocking rate per hectare to make the farm pay. We found that in year two there was very little diversity. It has been confirmed by scientists that European fallow deer are one of the most lacking in diversity of any species in the world. During the last glaciation there was believed to be less than 100 animals left. They are a very uniform population. The Romans and people since have selected them for coat cover, antler shape and things, but genetically they are a very uniform animal. That provides many challenges from a farming perspective because you need diversity to make progress.

One of the major hassles we have had is finding enough diversity to make genetic progress within the animals. We have had them for over 40 years so we have a lot of experience with this. In regard to the lack of genetic diversity, the committee has touched on darma darma a few times and on Mesopotamian genetics. The lack of access to outside genetics is a restraint on industry growth here and has been for some time.

There are a number of myths about Mesopotamian genetics, such as that they immediately change the animal overnight. Of course they don't. I have some records here that I am happy to table of slaughter weights from hybrids taken from this year back for the last few years in regard to what Mesopotamian hybrids have done for the South Australian industry. What they allow you to do is to turn animals off earlier. For instance, after 12 years of putting Mesopotamian hybrids over purer European fallow in South Australia, they have found that the antlers have virtually not changed. Although they change over time, the antlers haven't changed dramatically in 12 years so far. I don't know how long it will be before they do, but as yet they haven't.

One of the advantages of Mesopotamian genetics is that the pure Mesopotamians fawn about a month earlier. They will fawn in November. Mr Kelly talked about the growth cycle in Tasmania, so they will better match your growth cycle, but the hybrids in South Australia are, at best, 12 days earlier so it is significant but not very much. It is significant when you think that for fallow deer, an average through their life might be a 12:1 feed conversion ratio, so they will be eating 12 kilograms of food for every kilogram they put on. In their first three months, however,

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they will hit eight kilograms, so there is a 30 per cent increase in that really crucial first three months. When you are looking at low-margin, high-volume animals - a typical thriving enterprise - that is very significant to us.

Amongst the things we would like considered as part of this inquiry is that there be access to better farm genetics for us. There have been a lot of myths that they would be more invasive. There is no demonstrable example in the world - let us face it, they are extinct in the wild. The only wild population of Mesopotamian genetics in the world have been animals that have been re-released. There is no evidence to support the fact that they are more invasive than European fallow. If they are larger, there is every chance they will be less invasive because any large animal, as you know, is easier to control. So amongst the myths, that is one that I would like to put on the record for consideration.

I was very pleased that you asked those questions of the department. You are right, there has not been a thorough investigation done and it was very cursory in 1985. That is something that we would like considered, the access to outside genetics to promote our farming industry. We are talking only four farms. We are not talking about them getting into the wild, but we think it is one of the hurdles that could easily be removed which could aid industry well.

Mr GAFFNEY - One of the things that came up with the Mesopotamian that was put to us is that when the study was done in 1985 - and you would know this because you were there - they mentioned they could survive at a higher altitude so that is why they didn't want them here in case they escaped and went further into our highlands. Is there any truth in that?

Mr ARCHER - Their native habitat is between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers - think of the Marsh Arabs. The poor fellows were caught in a war zone and have been hunted extensively since biblical times. They were driven into habitats, in my view, outside their natural range. The earliest tapestry in the world shows a Mesopotamian stag. For someone who knows about deer, you can look at the antlers, look at the spots, and it is a perfect reflection of a Mesopotamian stag. They were in the parks in the lowlands but they have been driven into the highlands. Will they survive there? Yes, but they are not happy there. It is the same as European fallow, if you look at how invasive fallow deer are in Tasmania. If you look at the submissions I have prepared, and the Deer Farmers Council, we do not want to see any fallow deer where they should not be. Let there be no mistake, they should not be in the parks. They have no place, in our view, or the TFGA's view, moving into national parks.

Are Mesopotamians more invasive? I would argue less, not more. There is no evidence to support them being more invasive. In Tasmania, in general, fallow deer are not like elk. They cannot synthesise some of the trace elements elk have required to spread in New Zealand. One of them is cobalt, for instance. At very low levels, some species of animals can synthesise or accumulate very low doses to survive, but fallow deer cannot. They are like any other ruminant we have in Tasmania. Sheep and cows will not live on the west coast. That excludes them from the area, but does that mean they will not do damage? No, it does not. They can do damage where other ruminants can do damage.

As Bob Brown indicated yesterday, we do not want to see fallow deer in Walls of Jerusalem. I see no public benefit in the fallow deer moving into those areas.

Mr GAFFNEY - So for the genetics, the Mesopotamian would have an earlier birthing and be heavier, so it is a better value, bigger animal?

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Mr ARCHER - It does two things for us. It allows us to turn them off a bit earlier, not months but perhaps 50 days. The evidence I have from South Australia shows we might be able to turn them off two months earlier, which is a long time in a farming system. They would be going at 10 months, not 12 months. We hit very clean targets with our carcass figures. We like them to hit between 24 kilos and 29 kilos before we put them into the market. Most of the farmed animal meat that hits the market is from castrated animals. Females do not achieve target weights early enough for them to slaughter in the first year. With Mesopotamians, that is a possibility. We would be turning off females four to six months earlier.

Although it is only two months for males, the evidence so far for hybrids indicates we could turn them off three or four months earlier. It would make a big difference to the production system. It is allowing us to sell surplus females into the meat market. Half your deer herd becomes easier to market sooner and hit key targets.

Mr GAFFNEY - Would the earlier they come in or give birth be related to the climate of South Australia? We do not know how Mesopotamians would be in Tasmania because it is a different climate and different environment.

Mr ARCHER - I am not disagreeing with you. They are seasonal. We can achieve very good growth rates. Some of the better farmers, and there are a couple of them in the room today, are achieving growth rates only 40 days behind the Mesopotamian hybrids they get on the mainland. That is nearly 40 per cent better than some deer farms. There is a big bell curve in deer farmers, as there is in every other industry. The better deer farmers are achieving. The figures we are seeing today is due to the fact this fellow is a good operator. They are growing on good, irrigated pastures. I can't give you the answer to that.

Mr GAFFNEY - I will park that there. Mesopotamians are not allowed to come in, because they have made that decision. You cannot even import a *Dama dama*?

Mr ARCHER - No, we can't.

Mr GAFFNEY - Surely for genetic sourcing it would make sense to be able to improve the breed, or at least introduce a different line into what is in Tasmania?

Mr ARCHER - Absolutely. I deliberately bought these zoo animals because they were the only introduction that was definitely distinctly different. They came from a farm in South Australia. It was a park, called Lindsay Park. I bought these animals in my 20s because they were different. That has given me, I think, more diversity than some of the other herds in the state. Are they that much better? I have not done a trial to know. My view is they are in some areas. They are early maturing, they have a different carcass shape but there are certainly other European genetics we would like to access in Victoria. If nothing else, it would be good to trial them to see if they are better than what we have.

They are producing antlers as good as the best of ours, or superior. You heard representations the other day from one of our members, Nigel. He is running an enterprise looking at trophy heads. It is not my business it is Nigel's. It would enhance his business if he could access those genetics.

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Mr GAFFNEY - We heard from the department, when they made the decision back in 1995 or whenever, they now have better DNA sampling to make sure, whatever breed, if something came over it was only *Dama dama*. There tended to be a bit more give with their response. They are willing to look at that issue again.

Mr ARCHER - These are comparatively minor issues compared to us. The greatest threat our industry faces is the permission for wild-shot product to be sold commercially into our market. We would be out of business if that happened. We would walk away from our investment of 43 years. There are specialist fallow deer processing premises in the state. To correct the record: there is Doo-Town Game Meats. He was processing wallaby, but my understanding is this was not economic for him. He only processes fallow deer now, and he does a wonderful job - world-class. I have not seen a better product and I have seen a lot of good quality venison. Tony does a really world-class job.

When animals arrive at his slaughter premises, are put into dark, confined [inaudible]. They are slaughtered that day or the next by people who know what they are doing. They are handled quietly on-farm. We have been handling these things for 43 years. I can assure you we know how to handle them. My staff last week, my son and a stockman, put 1700 deer through our shed in a day. They are working on deer all week but in one day they put 1700 deer through the shed.

CHAIR - Do you slaughter your own?

Mr ARCHER - No, we don't. We have had an on-farm slaughter premise. We transport them to Doo-Town Meats. They have traditionally been slaughtered there by very good operators. We have had a slaughterhouse but we gave it away.

CHAIR - When you said 1700 went through - that was to go -

Mr ARCHER - They are being sorted. At this time of year, it is an important time from a management perspective to isolate does and fawns, to isolate slaughter animals from entire males. All our castrate animals are being run separately for the summer. We put our does away in fawning paddocks and we do not handle those does again until March. It is a crucial time for us to be putting deer through our sheds.

Mr GAFFNEY - How many would you slaughter a year?

Mr ARCHER - By the end of this fawning, end of January, we will have between 3500 to 4000 deer on our farm. In world terms that is a significant deer farm.

In terms of the industry throughput, I would have 1000 castrate males in good condition on irrigation, ready for slaughter today. We would sell them tomorrow if we could get an adequate price for them. I am not alone. Michal put a figure on it. I can't remember what it was. It is close to 2000 males slaughtered and ready to go in Tasmania today, which is not being sold.

CHAIR - Are you saying there is an adequate number of fallow deer in Tasmania for the market?

Mr ARCHER - More than adequate, not only for the local market. We have critical volume we could be using to supplying exports markets. Until you have significant numbers you need continuity of supply, I am sure you are aware we can ensure quality of supply. Our business can

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underwrite significant export orders in terms of volume and you need those numbers. There are some restrictions on the local market here.

You have seen presented over the last few days how much product comes into people's homes and we are not objecting to that. They are the conditions we exist under. Under the Meat Hygiene Act there are some issues. I think there are some problems in regard to biosecurity. When I dealt with the government and five other farmers around the Meat Hygiene Act, we were told, 'There are some things we will do for you, mate. Amongst the things we will do is make sure the Meat Hygiene Act makes sure no wild-shot product hits your market and only properly accredited meat goes through abattoirs, butcher shops and restaurants.' That is currently not the case. I have complained as late as January this year.

CHAIR - When did they make that commitment?

Mr ARCHER - That was in 1998. What happens now is because of austerity, and we have all had to cut our cloth. There is no check on the provenance of the meat. If meat is inspected at a premise, it is devolved to the local council meat inspector to check the product. They are very good at their job. They are there to ensure the temperature is right for human consumption but they are not obligated to check the provenance of the product. That is where the system is falling. Where has that product come from? Has it come out of South Australia, or has it come from the fellow next door? There is none of that checking and that needs to happen. That is a big threat to all meat in Tasmania, but particularly deer meat. If we get one food poisoning our business is at risk. All my friends who are deer farmers, their business is at risk. It is a biosecurity issue we need to tidy up.

Mr GAFFNEY - What was the name?

Mr ARCHER - Doo-Town Meats. He is processing a lot of deer. There is Cradoc, and there are others. He is a specialist. His whole business is venison.

CHAIR - Doo-Town Meat is on the Peninsula?

Mr ARCHER - Yes, a very good operator. His business is only venison.

CHAIR - His main market?

Mr ARCHER - You would need to talk to him about it but it is the Tasmanian market predominantly. He has sold a bit to Sydney, a bit to Melbourne, but he is a Tasmanian supplier of specialist restaurants, pubs and butcher shops. There are other places, Cradoc, for instance. I know they do boutique kills. Deer farmers take them along. There are other places that can be permitted to kill deer. It is a volume thing. There are businesses like Michael's and Doo-Town Meats who are specialist deer-only abattoirs. If wild-shot products are allowed to be sold in Tasmania, those fellows will be out of business.

Mr GAFFNEY - So if there was a wild-shot product that was sold on the mainland that would not be an issue for you?

Mr ARCHER - It is all an issue because it is all a potential market. We concentrate on product quality. I disagree very strongly with Mr Kelly who said today that farmed venison cannot be transported and turned into a quality product. We do it every week. We have been

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doing it for a long time. I am sure John would concede that. The product that is produced by Doo Town, in my view, is second to none. He does a wonderful job or we would not be using him. We are out of business if we do not have good fellows down the train. The product he is producing is very good and we can ensure the control of it. All our animals are run under irrigation on a farm. We can turn them out every day.

I think what was touched on by a number of other submissions is that with wild-shot product you do not have that quality control. You are looking at animals that might be 12 years old. I would not eat a 12-year-old sheep or cow, yet 12-year-old venison is offered to the market. I think the point Mr Kelly made was very good that there needs to be grading of that product for it to have any saleability. The problem is that any grading is variable, whereas lack of variability is one of the things that helps us sell a quality product, and we have gone to a lot of trouble to create that reputation. We would hate to see product shot in the bush and put in the Tasmanian market with a different label on it.

The meat market is very competitive. It is the same as any other business in Tasmania. There have been people touching on the pet food market, for instance. I have had pet food processors approach me wanting to buy venison from me in packaged and labelled form. This is 50 per cent more than their resale price that they would have to pay for it. Why are they doing that? Why are they wanting to buy my farm venison? The only reason that I would hypothesise is because it allows them to say the venison that is going through their room came from this legitimate deer farm. We wouldn't sell it to them. The substitution is a big deal, and there is no-one to check it.

Mr GAFFNEY - On that point, the deer farms provide a quality product and they can manage that. There seems to be an issue with wild deer. The solution that was given to us from Lenah Meats this morning was that if they were able to shoot more deer and provide that as for human consumption, that would help his business, obviously, but also help solve the problem with the deer. You wouldn't have an issue if that was sold on the mainland, if there was no Tasmanian market for that meat?

Mr ARCHER - Let us ask the basic question: would putting a commercial value on the wild herd make it easier to eliminate it? My view is it would be exactly the opposite. For instance, I have wild deer on our farms. At the moment we have third-generation hunters who have been hunting there for generations. We can't run our farm without hunters. Hunters are absolutely crucial to running all our crop-growing businesses and enterprises. The hunters are absolutely crucial to most farmers like us, but if you put a commercial value on those wild animals - and Don Jones commented that they will be on his farm today, someone else's tomorrow - it is in those farmers' interests to wait till the spring when the deer will come on their farms - 'Thanks very much, I'll have that at \$100 a head', or \$50 a head - and they will protect them so they can harvest them at that very low cost.

For me, I have to feed them for five months in the winter. I wear all that winter cost so they are available in spring and summer. If you put a commercial value on this wild herd you will have exactly the opposite effect to what we are all trying to do, which is stop the spread and contain them. I do not want to threaten Mr Kelly's business, I think he does a good job, but if the object is to confine the deer and stop the spread, this will have the opposite effect, because you are putting a commercial value on them and giving an incentive to people to run them on their neighbours' farms.

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Mr GAFFNEY - We heard, and you have mentioned, the capacity of does to birth every year depending on the percentage of weight and whatever. Now that we have better quality feed through the midlands and everyone can see that, do you believe there is a greater chance that our wild deer numbers will increase?

Mr ARCHER - Not this year, because remember, these deer were conceived in the drought. What was the doe's body weight when mating - below 35 kilos? I would argue it probably was in significant areas, but next season that is a different story because the does will go into the mating with higher body weight and instead of rearing perhaps 40-50 per cent percentage of fawns, they are much more likely to rear 90 per cent of fawns. Yearling does that wouldn't have gotten in fawn this year - because they were too light - will be in fawn next year. It depends when the rain falls, of course. Going into next mating next autumn in better weight, you will see an increase next year for sure.

Mr GAFFNEY - Now that we have more water through the midlands with our irrigation scheme -

Mr ARCHER - More food from water, you mean.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, more food from water, that will also impact.

Mr ARCHER - They are fringe dwellers so they will select the best food available. I have had them walk through crops of oats to eat lupins. They are highly intelligent animals and they will seek out the best food.

Mrs HISCUTT - You talked about expensive fencing. Are you able to give us a per annum cost of your repairs and maintenance on your fencing? Have you got a ballpark figure there?

Mr ARCHER - We've had a calamitous year, like a lot of other farmers in general. We've had several kilometres of deer fence washed away twice this year in floods.

Mrs HISCUTT - Perhaps you might think about in general - not flood.

Mr ARCHER - There was a figure given to the committee the other day of \$960 a roll per 100 metres of deer mesh. In addition to that you've got coils of wire. In our case we have high stocking rates. We try to carry roughly 40 deer to the hectare over the summer period and reduce the numbers over winter. We use a lot of supplementary feed so we bring in grain that we grow ourselves.

Mrs HISCUTT - But do you have a repairs and maintenance figure in your head on a per annum basis?

Mr ARCHER - Not for the deer farm specifically.

Mr MULDER - You supply to Doo Town and then they market the product. You are a wholesale supplier to a butchery.

Mr ARCHER - We supply live animals. The butcher comes and picks them up. He transports them, slaughters them at his premises and then what he does with them is his affair. In our case we also do some direct marketing, but predominantly our preference would be to have someone take them. We want to just be deer farmers, not deer marketers.

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Mr MULDER - You want to be a primary producer and let other people do the marketing.

Mr ARCHER - Absolutely. That would be our preference.

CHAIR - Thanks very much, Anthony.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.