



Feral goat populations in Australia are causing extensive environmental damage. CSIRO Publishing

Safari hunting – in Australia?

Most parts of Australia are cursed with at least a few species of feral animals, such as pigs, deer, goats, foxes or buffalo, and some people have a passion for hunting such game. Put the two together and you have a safari hunting industry. However, it's not really that simple. There are ethical and animal welfare concerns, conflicting interests, government regulations, possibly a need for new infrastructure and conservation, management and economic considerations.

So is safari hunting of introduced game a sensible, desirable and sustainable proposition in Australia and, if so, what is the best way to go about it?

Safari hunting is 'a form of recreation in which animals are hunted and some form of trophy is taken.' Usually, a guide assists the hunters. Recently, Dr Gordon Dryden and Mr Neal Finch, of the School of Animal Studies at the University of Queensland, Professor Stephen Craig-Smith and Dr Charles Arcodia, of the University's School of Tourism and Leisure Management, and Dr John Trone of the University's Law School, investigated the concept of safari hunting of feral animals. The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation funded their study.

Their report, *Safari Hunting of Australian Exotic Wild Game*, is now available and it covers the full range of issues mentioned above and many more.

The authors suggest that hunting of feral animals can be regarded as a component of

the burgeoning rural tourism industry. They identify many potential advantages in attracting hunters. Safari hunters tend to be big spenders and, with cooperation between the tourism and hunting operations, game-hunting tourism could be very lucrative. Indeed, already we have a small commercial safari hunting industry in Australia, worth about \$5 million a year.

Overseas models include a well-established, modern industry in South Africa, where governments regard commercial hunting and game ranching as agricultural pursuits and provide them with research and extension back-up, and North America, where hunting ethicists stress the need for 'respect for the quarry' and licensing schemes generate substantial revenues for state wildlife agencies. In New Zealand, introduced animals are the basis of a game hunting industry and the Department of Conservation uses recreational and commercial hunting to help manage pest animal populations, especially of thar (introduced from India) and deer.

Animal welfare concerns immediately spring to mind and the authors are well aware also of the 'continuum of opinion' about the acceptability of wildlife use. For example, recreational hunting sits between commercial whaling (less acceptable) and recreational fishing (more acceptable) on the continuum of community attitudes.

'At one extreme sit those who regard any use of wild animals as unacceptable, while at the other end, all uses are accept-

able to some people,' says Finch. 'Humans also tend to regard some animals as having more intrinsic worth than others, favouring warm and cuddly mammals over reptiles and frogs.'

'A successful safari hunting industry will have to be conducted in a manner that is acceptable to most Australians,' says Craig-Smith. 'And I know, because even my own family gave me a hard time for working on this project.'

All hunting clubs that were surveyed by the researchers listed their ethical concerns about hunting. Several referred to their code of ethics or conduct and inferred that adherence to these would result in ethical hunting practice.

The report presents a conceptual framework for possible expansion of the industry. Clients, many of whom will come from overseas, will want a genuine 'hunting experience' and the industry will need to meet their expectations of trophy quality and accommodation (a basic hunting shack may not be enough for an overseas visitor). The industry will have to share the use of exotic wild animals with traditional landowners and recreational hunters and, of course, not impinge on the use of grazing lands by farmers and graziers.

It will be important not to over-exploit the hunted resource, to maintain its trophy quality and to cooperate with conservation authorities in the management of feral animals. A conflict of interest might occur here between conservation goals to minimise feral populations and the wish to preserve them for hunting.

Dryden and his colleagues make 17 specific recommendations to guide any expansion of the safari hunting industry. Not the least of these is a legally enforceable code of practice for the commercial hunting industry that addresses the welfare of hunted animals and respect for the environment and property of landholders. Another key recommendation is that safari hunters and ecotourists be kept well apart so that both can have access to wild exotic animals without conflict – one group with guns cocked, the other with cameras poised.

● Steve Davidson

More information

Safari Hunting of Australian Exotic Wild Game: www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/NAP/04-108.pdf

Contacts: Gordon Dryden, g.dryden@uq.edu.au or Stephen Craig-Smith, s.craigsmith@mailbox.uq.edu.au