

Hunting puts park users in cross-hairs, rangers maintain

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PARK rangers overwhelmingly oppose hunting in NSW national parks and many believe it poses a serious risk to human lives, as well as killing native animals and damaging existing feral animal control programs.

The first comprehensive survey of rangers and other National Parks and Wildlife Service staff, who will have to oversee the shooting program, found 95.9 per cent believe the NSW government's plan to introduce recreational hunting into 79 parks would endanger park users.

Just over half the 292 staff surveyed by the Public Service Association this month said they had already "witnessed and observed signs of unauthorised hunting in national parks", and many gave details of dead native animals and unsafe hunting practices.

"I would not be comfortable supervising recreational hunters for fears of my own safety," one ranger said. Another said they were "concerned about increasing potential to be shot at work or visiting [the national park] - the boundaries between [the park] and other adjoining land is often complex on a map, let alone in the field. The potential for a legal shot over there to be manslaughter over here is huge."

Kangaroos shot with arrows, mutilated wallabies and emus, wombats with gunshot wounds and many other illegal activities were described by rangers in hundreds of anonymous reports.

They described ducking to avoid gunshots from illegal hunting, dealing with groups of intoxicated armed hunters, and increases in the number of people who believed it was already "open season" in national parks.

Only 5.9 per cent believed the Game Council of NSW should manage and supervise groups of hunters, while 63.3 per cent said the job should be done by rangers. Hunting would have a bad effect on native animals, according to 85.8 per cent of the national parks workers.

The state government agreed to open 79 national parks and reserves for recreational hunting of feral animals as part of a deal with the Shooters and Fishers Party to win upper house support for the government's electricity privatisation legislation, which passed in June.

Shooters and Fishers MPs were unavailable to discuss the findings of the Public Service Association survey yesterday.

The government has said parks will be closed to the public when hunts are under way, and hunting parties will be closely supervised.

The Game Council of NSW oversees existing recreational hunting for feral pests in state forests, but it emerged last month the group employs only four full-time staff to monitor hunting in more than 1.75 million hectares of state forests.

Rangers said they were already facing staff cuts and were not trained to act as hunting guides and supervisors.

"All this will do is put park users and NPWS staff at risk," one said. "It is also likely to be quite resource-intensive to manage and regulate."

No respondents said the introduction of hunting would be "good" for rangers trying to do their jobs, 71.1 per cent said it would be "bad" for their jobs, and 83 per cent said it would be bad for their own safety.

"Hunters are motivated by their sport of killing animals, not protecting biodiversity by reducing feral threats. NPWS are science-based professionals motivated by the need to protect biodiversity," another ranger said. "It is not strategic nor targeted, and it provides incentives for hunters to introduce feral pests in a clandestine manner in order to allow them to pursue their sport."



At risk ... rangers report seeing animals, including kangaroos, mutilated and shot with arrows.

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