

Victorian Greens ANIMALS POLICY REVIEW 2015

Following is a submission to the Victorian Greens Animals policy review as invited by email circulated in February 2015.

The comments, observations and proposals made are mine only and do not represent any of the organisations I am affiliated with. I list those only to context my submission.

I make these comments and proposals as someone not a member of The Greens but who has some sympathy with their policies on food. Contributing to my comments and proposals are a background as a Landcare educator, permaculture design system educator, local government policy writer for community food garden initiatives, international development worker on agricultural and farming education programs and as an advocate for a fair food system in Australia as described by the [Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance's Peoples' Food Plan](http://www.australianfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/peoples-food-plan/) (<http://www.australianfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/peoples-food-plan/>).

DEFINITION

The use of the term 'recreational hunting' in this submission is to be taken to imply these meanings:

- hunting that is not the main commercial livelihood of the hunter
- hunting done by non-professional hunters for purposes of food harvesting, land management and feral animal control
- hunting that may include some small-scale monetary or exchange transaction that does not constitute the main livelihood of the recreational hunter
- the definition used in this document excludes hunting for fun involving the indiscriminate killing of wildlife, whether native or introduced.

RECREATIONAL HUNTING

In its document, the Policy Committee Report quotes a "lead petitioner" defining recreational hunting as hunting for "fun" and of it being "detrimental to the advancement of human society".

The latter statement is a vague philosophical assumption sweeping in its generalisation and in its lack of evidence, and is best regarded as individual opinion. As stated, the definition of the 'recreational hunting' in this document is that offered above.

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• Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network
• Permaculture Australia • TerraCircle Inc.

PROPOSAL

My proposal is that the Greens support the continuation of recreational hunting, as defined above, for the following reasons.

REASON 1:

Hunting is part of the human experience

This is a perspective drawn from evolutionary biology and anthropology. It is a 'big picture' or contextual consideration to provide broad context to the practice of recreational hunting and the relationship between humans and animals.

My points:

- the evidence of anthropology is that hunting has been part of the human food gathering and tribal/rural/urban industrial experience for millennia, and continues to be so
- hunting has been practiced by most human cultures, primarily as a means of obtaining the concentrated energy and nutrition in animal foods, including terrestrial animals, avifauna and fish
- according to some paleoanthropologists, hunting may have contributed to the physical structure of humans and to their brain development.

Proposal:

The Greens Animals policy support recreational hunting and fishing so as to make possible engagement in a human tradition spanning millennia and so as participants may derive learning and understanding of natural systems and their relationship to humanity.

REASON 2:

Hunting is a means of obtaining food

Hunting, trapping and fishing are technologies developed to obtain food and other useful materials from animals. This is another big picture or contextual statement.

My points:

- hunting is a tradition of indigenous and non-

indigenous Australians (a term describing Australians of non-Aboriginal origin)

- hunting has been a tradition of European Australians ever since the start of European settlement
- hunting continues to be a means of human nutrition for both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, mainly those living in rural areas where there is ready access to hunting resources.

Proposal:

The Animals policy support recreational hunting and fishing so as to provide continuing experience in a traditional human practice spanning millennia and for its contribution to the healthy diets of those citizens engaging in the activities.

REASON 3:

Hunting is part of Australian rural culture

My points:

- for both rural farmers and townspeople, hunting remains a part of their culture
- were the Greens to seek to end recreational hunting, it could work against their electoral prospects and reputation in rural regions were it to be perceived as an imposition of urban values on rural people
- rural farmers also hunt to control wildlife on farms, and this can be important to the security of their livelihoods
- hunting can contribute to individual and family self-reliance.

Proposal:

The Animals policy support recreational hunting and fishing to ensure the continuity of a cultural tradition of rural Australians.

REASON 4:

Hunting and fishing for food disintermediates hunters and fishers from the industrial food chain

My points:

- combined with growing some of the herbs, vegetables, fruits and nuts, hunting and fishing have the potential to increase the nutritional self-reliance of individuals and families
- self-reliance is a value highly regarded in Australian society
- hunting and fishing are a means of obtaining fresh food free of the amendments incorporated in foods on their journey through the industrial food processing chain
- in some regions, hunting and fishing have the potential to increase the food security of individuals and families
- in some regions, hunting and fishing are traditional practices the free choice of those engaged in them; thus, hunting and fishing can contribute to the food sovereignty of their practitioners (food sovereignty can be defined as the freedom to choose the types of food preferred, produced in ways the eater approves of).

Proposal:

The Animals policy support recreational hunting and fishing so as to support:

- the food sovereignty and food security of indigenous Australians so that they may continue traditional practices where those practices have no detrimental effect on earth systems, including ecosystems
- the food sovereignty and food security of non-indigenous Australians under the conditions of the above point
- self-reliance in the sourcing of food.

REASON 5:

The actions of a comparative few irresponsible hunters should not be used to block the opportunities open to the responsible majority

My points:

- to allow this to happen by opposing responsible recreational hunting and fishing as defined at the start of this document would be to hand power to the irresponsible and to disadvantage the responsible, essentially an anti-democratic move.

Proposal:

The Animals policy support responsible recreational hunting and fishing and seek ways to engage with amateur hunting and fishing representatives to educate hunters and fishers in how to go about their activity responsibly.

REASON 6:

The Animals policy states in Point 6: Introduced species that cause environmental damage, including to native wildlife, habitat, agricultural production or human health, should be humanely controlled.

My points:

- hunting, targeted on particular wildlife species that cause damage to ecosystems, whether those species be introduced or native, can be a means of turning a problem feral animal into a solution as a food source
- in this way, hunting becomes a tool in land management.

Proposal:

The Animals policy retains Point 6.

COMMENT ON THE EXISTING VICTORIAN GREENS ANIMALS POLICY

What follows are comments on statements appearing in the Animals policy and, in some cases, proposals for change or retention.

POINT 1:

The Animals policy states that the way we treat animals reflects how we treat ourselves and our society. The Greens will work towards ending animal cruelty.

My points:

- the first sentence comes across as a sweeping generalisation that suggests that poor treatment of humans and animals is deliberate; it obviously is so at times, but the link between the treatment of humans and animals in this regard is a tenuous one
- the latter sentence is commendable and would presumably be supported by many hunters.

Proposal:

Remove the first point linking humans and animals and their treatment and retain that about ending animal cruelty (that term needs definition).

POINT 2:

the Animals policy states that animals are sentient beings capable of feeling and suffering. Their intrinsic worth is separate from the needs of humans, and the welfare of animals must be respected with regard to both the survival of species and the protection of individual animals.

My points:

- the first sentence is supported by readily-available evidence.
- the second sentence, about the intrinsic needs of animals being separate from humans, could ignore the co-evolution of particular animal species, such as dogs, with humans in which the transaction was one mutualism in terms of obtaining food and protection.

Proposal:

The policy be amended to state that animals have a value-to-themselves and as a lifeform—their intrinsic value—and that they have a value of mutualism in their associations with humans.

POINT 5: Maintaining biodiversity

The Greens policy on animals states, Point 5: Victoria's biodiversity, including native wildlife and its natural habitat, is of immense value, and must be maintained and enhanced.

My points:

- this is a value judgement based on a understanding of the intrinsic value of biodiversity (defined for this document as the range of plants and animals present in a ecosystem, ecological community or biome at a particular time but that changes over time due to climatic, biotic and human influence) and how biodiversity provides environmental services, including food, of value to humans
- I would add that biodiversity extends well beyond native fauna and flora to introduced species—including those that have potential to predate and displace native species of plants and animals—as well as introduced species that are environmentally neutral or that broaden our biodiversity in a beneficial way, some species of which are of direct nutritional or functional value to humans; all of these are part of our contemporary biodiversity
- assuming that the wildlife and plant communities that European settlers encountered a little over 200 years ago represent an authentic native biodiversity omits the influence of indigenous Australians in reshaping the landscapes and ecologies that they encountered when they arrived on the continent; their management of landscapes, frequently using fire as a tool, was a process of selection of plant species and communities and, hence, a selective process of land management for the animals they preferred to hunt.

Proposal:

The Greens maintain this point in their Animals policy and extend it to cover introduced species of plants and animals in recognition of the changed biota of contemporary ecosystems and biomes.

COMMENT ON GREENS VICTORIA ANIMAL POLICY AIMS

AIM 1.

The establishment of an independent regulatory body for animal welfare.

My points:

- may I comment on this with a question? Do we need yet another government body and yet more regulation in a society that many see as already over-regulated and over-governed?
- would it be a better, more economical and a less-regulatory solution to enable existing animal welfare agencies, government and non-government, to better look after animal welfare?

AIM 2.

An end to farming practices that are inconsistent with animals' natural behavioural needs, and a phasing out of all intensive farming practices.

My points:

- this needs more precision in defining what is meant by "intensive farming practices".
- does it refer to feedlot beef and other, similar production systems? Does it refer to barn-raised poultry or battery production? Does it refer to any farming system that concentrates quantities of animals in a limited area?
- there are good environmental, health and humane reasons to phase out feedlot and battery production of animal products
- applied too broadly, however, the policy against intensive farming practices could act against the further development of urban agriculture where the availability of space limits the area available to agricultural animals and requires some degree of intensification of production.

AIM 4.

An end to the captivity and killing of animals for the cosmetic and fashion industries, including the use of fur.

My points:

- ending the use of fur for clothing places a limit on a potential economic incentive for harvesting rabbits and foxes, and on the use of skins as a byproduct of the meat industry

Proposal:

The statement about furs be deleted from the Animals policy (recognising that it might be politically difficult for The Greens to propose the popularisation of clothing made from feral fox, rabbit and cat furs).

AIM 8.

The implementation of sustainable farming and fishing practices that cause the least impact on native animal habitat, soils, water and climate.

My points:

- here, again, we find the artificial and reductionist division between native and exotic; the division simplifies the complexities and interrelationships we find in earth systems today

Proposal:

Restate the Aim to include farming and fishing practices that cause least harm to all environments and their animal and human inhabitants, with the exclusion of particular species with proven potential to degrade those environments (foxes, rabbits etc).

This would validate recreational hunting as a tool in land management.

AIM 19.
The continued banning of the commercial killing of kangaroos and other wildlife.

My points:

- the effect of this could be to limit the livelihoods of farmers where native animals compete for resources
- there is a good argument for the hunting of native wildlife as an economic alternative to grazing of introduced animals with their greater potential for damaging landscapes where overstocked

Proposal:

The Greens' Animals policy give qualified support to commercial hunting of selected native species as an alternative to extensive rangeland grazing.

AIM 22.
The effective control or elimination of populations of feral and pest animals by the most humane methods feasible.

My points:

- eliminating many feral species is probably impossible due to their distribution, numbers and integration into food webs
- finding economic value in products derived from feral and pest species could sustain eradication programs and turn a problem into a solution by giving feral species a market value of a commodity.

Proposal:

The Greens Animals policy be restated to support the control of feral animals and the role of recreational hunting, rather than the use of poisons, in doing this.

AIM 26.
More severe penalties for animal cruelty and the illegal capture and sale of native animals, and providing adequate resource for their investigation and prosecution.

My points:

- this aim suggests that proscribing an action and imposing even more regulatory and severe measures will somehow stop people engaging in that action; I think this is a mistaken belief because it would merely drive those actions underground and in some cases lead to the setting up of black markets
- are existing penalties already severe enough?
- once again we have the artificial division of life into native and non-native with the accompanying though unstated assumption that only the native is worthy of protection; this is a value judgement of the discriminatory kind and chooses to ignore the ecological reality that nature makes use of whatever resources it has at hand, whether native or exotic
- environmentalists have in the past proposed that a trade in native animals would be a market-led means of conserving them.

Proposal:

Amend the Greens Animals policy to state that a regulated trade in particular native animals be encouraged as a means of ensuring the continuity of selected species. The trade would be a co-operation between traders and conservation bodies, government and non-government, and be targeted at particular species.

AIM 30.

The end of recreational hunting on public land

My points:

- this should depend on the particular type of public land
- recreational hunting may have value in land management and feral species control on some public lands.

Proposal:

Amend the Animal policy to state that the Greens support a ban on recreational hunting on some types of public lands and engage in further consultation to define what lands they would be.