

Hunting & feral animal control: conservation or con?

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Hunters are attempting to rebrand their recreation as conservation on the basis that they kill feral animals that cause great harm to the Australian environment. For this ostensible purpose, hunters have been granted access to public lands (>2 million hectares in NSW) and supported with millions of dollars of public funding, and a current NSW bill proposes to allow hunting in national parks and the establishment of game parks. But the goals of hunting and those of feral animal control are mostly not the same. Ad hoc killing of feral animals does not count as conservation because most of those killed are quickly replaced. Sometimes, hunting can exacerbate problems, by making animals more wary or motivating the introduction, spread or protection of feral animals. Feral animal control is one of Australia's biggest environmental (and animal welfare) challenges. Conservation requires professionally managed programs with specified goals, the use of effective and humane methods and skilled operators, and monitoring. In some cases, skilled voluntary shooters may be able to contribute to such programs.