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MEDIA RELEASE

'Was that a gun?' Hunting in National Parks may begin in the near future, and locals are worried.

Hunting may begin in National Parks in the very near future, and Eurobodalla bushwalking and conservation groups are increasingly concerned about the dangers likely to be faced by their members - and by members of the public more broadly - in the months and years to come as result of this new practice.

'No-one will be able to enjoy a peaceful walk in their local National Park in the future', said John Perkins, Convenor of the Friends of Durras. "You'll always be on guard, not knowing whether someone with a gun or a hunting bow is just around the next corner or behind that stand of trees. You won't be able to let the kids run on ahead, because you'll never be sure what they're going to run into.

"And on top of this you'll need to be very careful not to annoy any hunter you come across. Only last week, a farmer who challenged two shooters hunting kangaroos on his property near Orange without his permission won himself a threatening shot to the ground around his feet and had his mobile phone smashed - and this is just the latest reported act of aggression by hunters towards people seen as getting in their way."

Mr Perkins dismissed Premier O'Farrell's claim that amateur hunting in National Parks will be carefully regulated and monitored as 'a fairy tale'.

"Let's look at some facts. The NSW Game Council is to be the body responsible for managing shooting in our Parks. Yet members of the Game Council's ruling body are being investigated for serious breaches of some of the same regulations they're supposed to enforce.

"There are no checks on the skills or safety records of people applying for licenses to shoot in National Parks. Would-be shooters apply on-line. They may never have used a gun on a firing range, let alone off one. Possession of a gun license, together with an 'R' license - something you can get without ever having fired a gun by simply sitting an open-book exam - is sufficient qualification to shoot in a National Park. Children as young as 12 will be allowed to use firearms in the National Park as long as they have a parent supervising - but how responsible is the average 12 year old? And who checks that the supervising parent is a responsible person?

"At a hunting expo last weekend the Game Council offered free-of-charge recreational hunting licenses to Victorian hunters as a promotion of hunting in NSW National Parks. This was described as a tourism initiative. But what background checks were done on license recipients? Do we know who are we inviting to shoot in our forests? And anyway, do we want a form of tourism based on blood sports?"

Mr Perkins pointed out that the risk assessment report produced by the Office of Environment and Heritage earlier this year warned of a high risk of injury or death resulting from the introduction of hunting into National Parks. It also identified serious and systemic inadequacies in the proposed management process. Mr Perkins suggested the Premier's refusal to release this report to the public indicates that he is aware of the legislation's deficiencies but is unwilling, or perhaps unable, to address them.

"The South Australian amateur hunting in National Parks program was recently shut down following an accident in which an amateur hunter shot another hunter in the leg", said Mr Perkins. "Mr O'Farrell claims to be basing his scheme on the South Australian one, but although the South Australian one involved far more rigorous supervision of amateur hunters than what is proposed in his legislation, the accident still occurred. The South Australian experience confirms that guns in National Parks are a recipe for disaster."

Mr Perkins said that many people in Eurobodalla may consider themselves unaffected by this issue. Most National Parks in the Shire are not included among the 77 identified as subject to the legislation. "Let's not kid ourselves. The legislation is open-ended. Next month, or next year, or perhaps the year after, the National Park near you will be opened to hunters if we don't stop this legislation from taking effect.

"Before he was elected, Premier O'Farrell promised that there would be no hunting allowed in National Parks, and after the election the promise was repeated by the Minister for the Environment, Robyn Parker. This promise must be kept. And those of us who live surrounded by the beautiful National Parks of the South Coast have to keep up the pressure on the Premier and other members of State Government - particularly local State members - to make sure it is."

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